

THE Atlantic

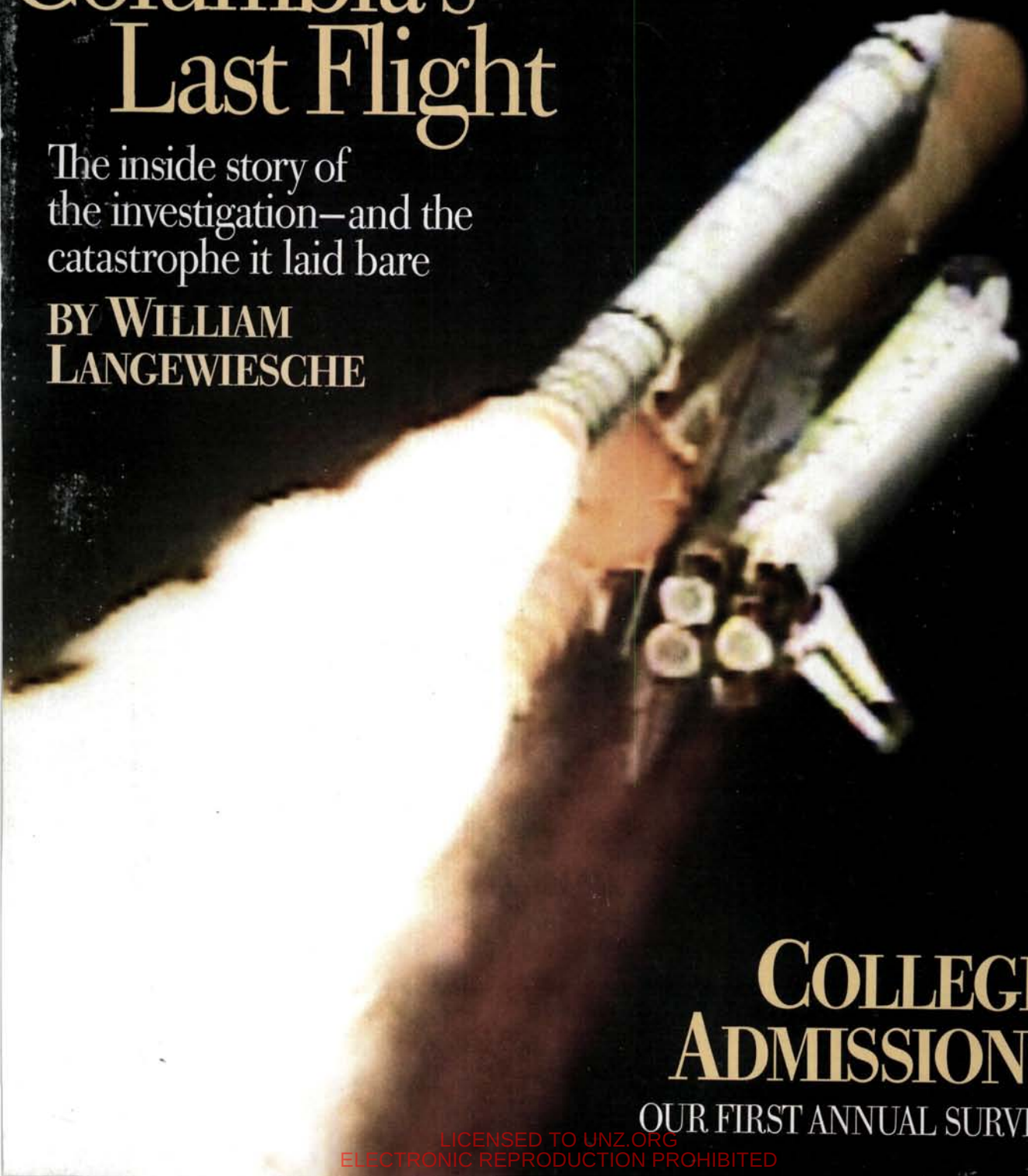
NOVEMBER 2003

MONTHLY

Columbia's Last Flight

The inside story of
the investigation—and the
catastrophe it laid bare

BY WILLIAM
LANGEWIESCHE



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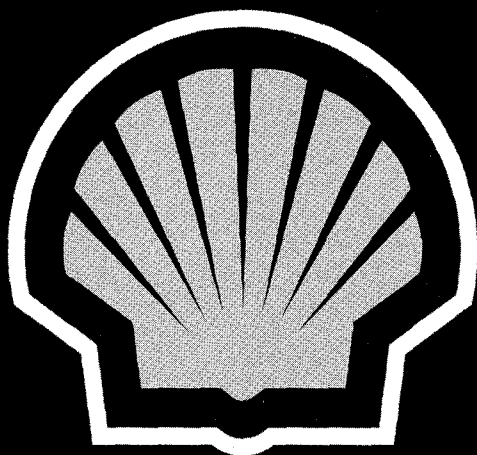
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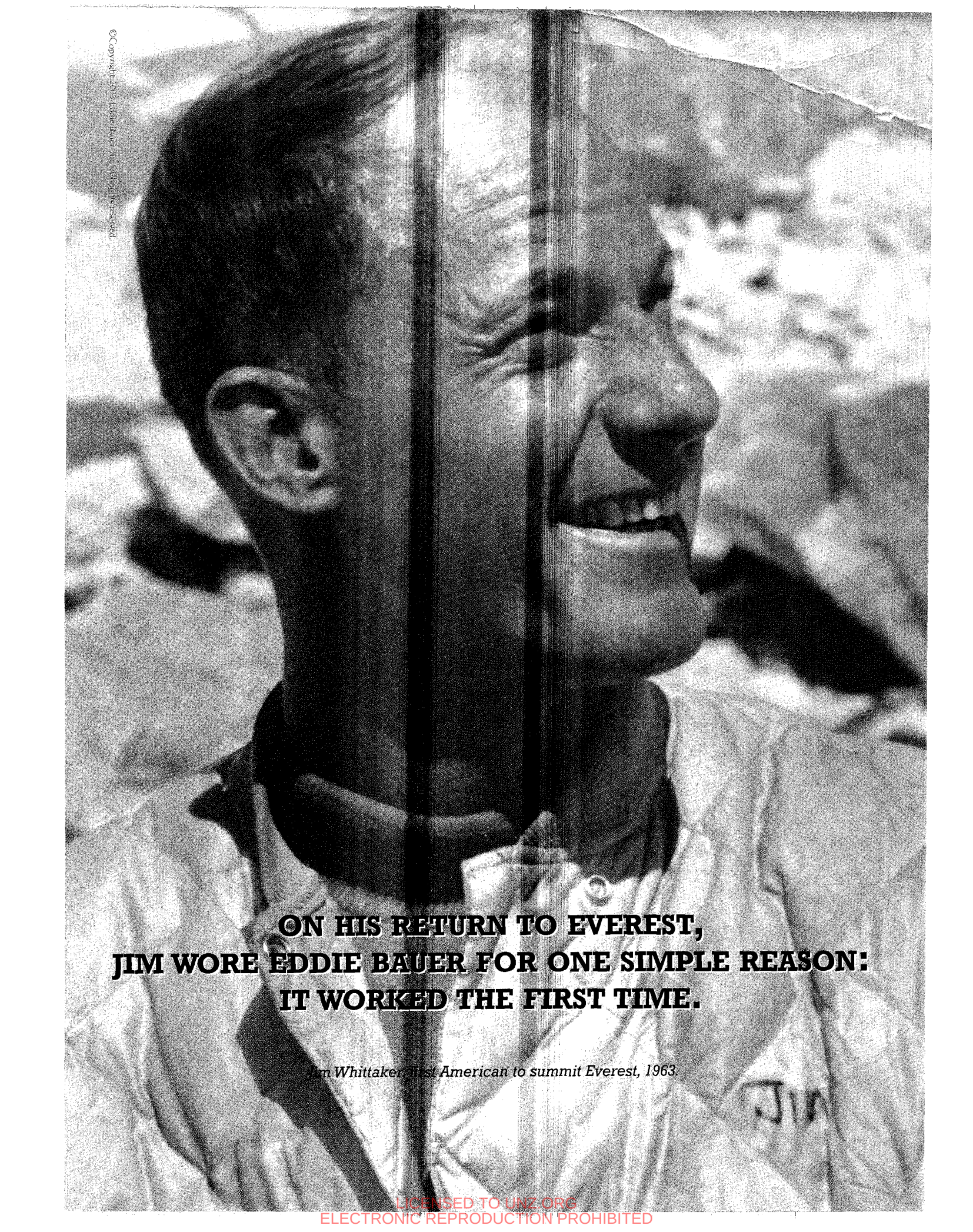
OR MAKE A DREAM COME TRUE?

IS THERE A CHOICE?



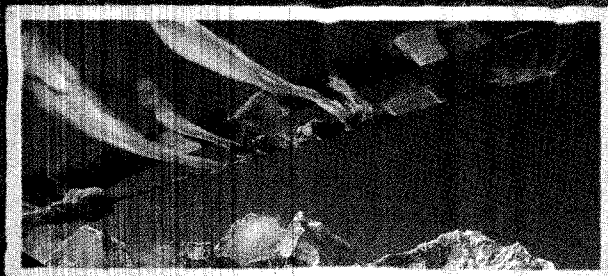
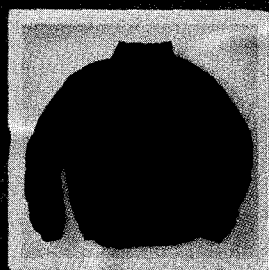
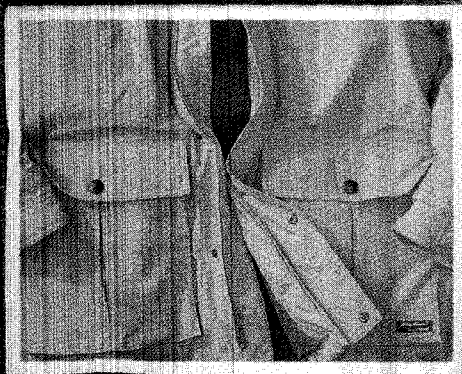
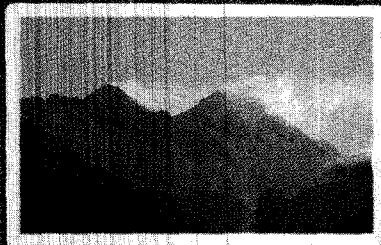
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THE Atlantic

VOLUME 292 NO. 4 / NOVEMBER 2003

14 LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE AGENDA

39 ODIIOUS RULERS, ODIIOUS DEBTS

Should the people of Iraq be forced to pay back money borrowed by Saddam? A Nobel laureate makes an urgent case for forgiveness
by Joseph Stiglitz

46 BRIEF LIVES DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

Why all Anglican eyes in London are nervously fixed on a powerful African archbishop *by Philip Jenkins*

52 POST MORTEM BRIGHT YOUNG THING WITH A BLIND SPOT

Diana Mosley (1910–2003) *by Mark Steyn*

54 PRIMARY SOURCES

George Bush's new report card for government agencies; the odds of terrorist attack in the coming year; why marriage and high achievement don't mix—for men

56 THE WORLD IN NUMBERS MURDER BY THE STATE

by Bruce Falconer

58 COLUMBIA'S LAST FLIGHT

The inside story of the investigation—and the catastrophe it laid bare *by William Langewiesche*

89 CLOSE-UP: YOUNG RUMSFELD

The Donald Rumsfeld of thirty years ago was a lot like the man we know today—a divisive figure who relishes bureaucratic combat, aims to shake up the established order, and is tenaciously committed to his own ideas and ambitions. But he was also a social moderate and a dove *by James Mann*

104 THE ATLANTIC COLLEGE-ADMISSIONS SURVEY

"Calm down!" the deans and counselors say. Herewith our first annual exploration of the American college-admissions system

106 THE NEW COLLEGE CHAOS *by James Fallows*

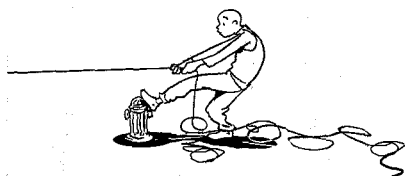
116 THE LATE-DECISION PROGRAM *by V. V. Ganeshanathan*

118 WHAT MAKES A COLLEGE GOOD? *by Nicholas Confessore*

128 THE SELECTIVITY ILLUSION *by Don Peck*

130 THE BIAS QUESTION *by Jay Mathews*

*Cover photograph: television image of Columbia liftoff,
January 16, 2003 (AP Photo/NASA TV)
Heading drawings throughout by Istvan Banyai*



88 NATURAL SETTINGS *Poems by David Barber and Erica Funkhouser*

.....

BOOKS & CRITICS

- 143 NEW & NOTEWORTHY** *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*, by David L. Chappell; *Madam Secretary*, by Madeleine Albright; *Goethe, Volume II*, by Nicholas Boyle; *The Scofield Study Bible, King James Version*; *The Afterlife*, by Penelope Fitzgerald; *Governor Reagan*, by Lou Cannon
reviewed by Benjamin Schwarz
- 148 AMERICAN RADICAL** Mark Twain developed an enormous and subversive personality—but Fred Kaplan's new biography illumines it only in flickers *by Christopher Hitchens*
- 153 LET'S CALL THE WHOLE THING OFF** "Because the contemporary white wedding is an event staged by a dozen subcontractors," our author writes, reviewing a new how-to guide for backing out of an engagement, "the book includes ample advice about breaking the bad news to one's various vendors and possibly leveraging a broken heart into a refunded deposit"
by Caitlin Flanagan
- 156 PRINCESS OF DISCRIMINATION** Shirley Hazzard's masterly descriptions and expertly drawn characters are in full evidence in *The Great Fire*—her first novel in more than twenty years
reviewed by Thomas Mallon
- 160 COLLECTED ARTISTRY** *The Early Stories 1953–1975*, by John Updike *reviewed by Scott Shibuya Brown*
- 161 THE STORY OF A WAR** *The Iraq War: A Military History*, by Williamson Murray and Major General Robert H. Scales Jr.
reviewed by Robert D. Kaplan
- 163 FABULOUS FORGERIES** *My Life as a Fake*, by Peter Carey
reviewed by Michael Corra
- 165 THEIR SHOW OF SHOWS** *Everything Was Possible: The Birth of the Musical Follies*, by Ted Chapin *reviewed by Corby Kummer*
-

PURSUIITS & RETREATS

- 173 INNOCENT BYSTANDER THE PATH OF BRIGHTEOUSNESS**
The annals of semantic substitution—in which a name change is proposed for an entire group of people, and everyone goes along—are not voluminous. Undaunted, some atheists are now giving it a try, calling themselves "brights" *by Cullen Murphy*
- 175 FICTION YAO'S CHICK** *A short story by Max Apple*
- 187 THE PUZZLER** *by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon*
- 188 WORD COURT** *by Barbara Walltraff*



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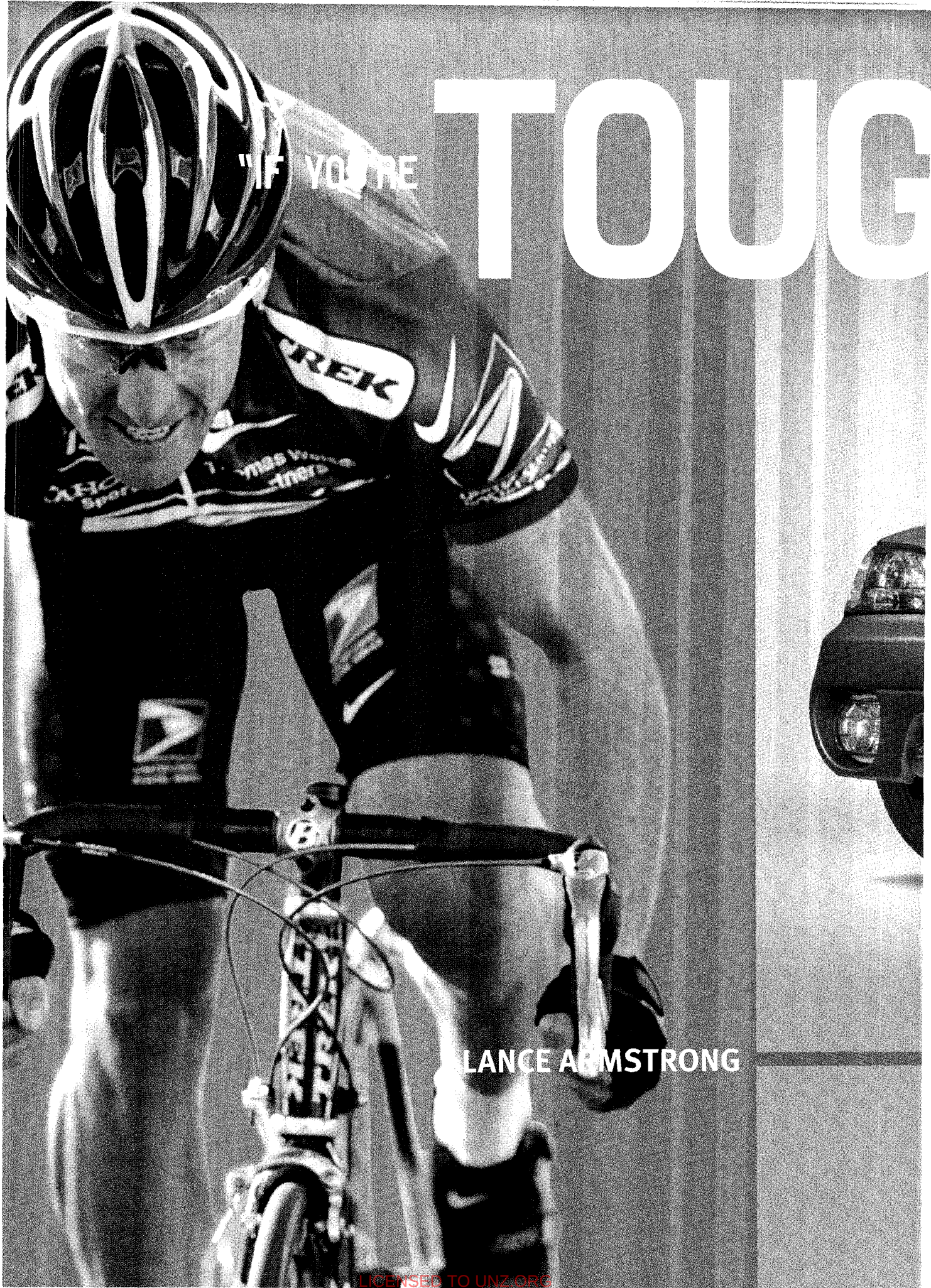
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Interview: Carey talks about his new novel, *My Life as a Fake*, reviewed in this issue by Michael Corra.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

People Like Us

In "People Like Us" (September *Atlantic*), David Brooks highlights the tendency of like-minded individuals to form homogeneous clusters. In that exercise he takes a somewhat passive approach to the phenomenon, implying that it happens over time and possibly without awareness. In the workplace this homogenization is a great deal less benign. Applicants for jobs, and the organizations to which they apply, often go through an elaborate dance to determine if they are compatible. This dance is performed through recruiting, plant visits, interviews, and so forth. If a compatibility of values is apparent (assuming, of course, that the basic credentials/abilities/skills are also present in the applicant), an offer is made and often accepted. But things are not always as they seem. Organizations do not always portray their values accurately, and applicants have a tendency to provide a view of themselves most likely to result in an offer. Then the fun begins. In most cases the organization takes increasingly direct steps to eliminate the non-conforming hire. This might take the form of withholding information from the new hire to limit accomplishments, or providing stultifying or doomed-to-failure assignments. If these tactics don't work, the strategies become more direct—poor performance reviews, public criticism, and so on. Eventually the new hire "gets it" and leaves.

This model has been dubbed the attraction-selection-attrition model by behavioral scientists—most prominently Ben Schneider and his colleagues at the University of Maryland. Their model identifies the personality of a founder or a strong leader as the "core" of the homogeneity. A founder or CEO surrounds him or her self with people who share his or her values. These deputies,

in turn, recruit and hire people who are similar to them (and, by extension, to the founder/CEO). Thus the organization becomes populated by people with the same interests and values, who tend to think alike (the "groupthink" phenomenon). While paying lip service to "diversity," the organization sets about creating and maintaining homogeneity.

Some implications of this model are interesting. Organizations commonly endorse changing their "culture" through various interventions (organizational change and development programs, seminars, workshops). In fact cultures change with new leadership. The legendary "turnaround leader," credited with single-handedly changing the culture, actually sweeps in like the lead biker in a pack of Hells Angels, collecting trusted (that is, like-minded) deputies from earlier corporate lives. So what actually happens is more like corporate cleansing than a Herculean effort by a single person to persuade incumbents to change their way of thinking. Bill Bratton became the new police chief in Los Angeles earlier this year. When he arrived, he announced that he was the "new sheriff" in town, and that anyone who didn't sign on to his vision of a reformed department should "put in their papers" (retire or quit). A similar phenomenon occurs with a merger or an acquisition. Two organizations vow to form a stronger union from the diversity of approaches and opinions of the leaders of those organizations. Six months later the weaker of the two leaders is gone, along with his or her deputies.

Schneider asserts that "people make the place." He appears to be right. Brooks observes the same phenomenon in non-work settings. Central to both settings is the desire to associate with people who share one's values. Without the random variation of diversity, social groupings and organizations will inevitably suc-

cumb to external forces and fail to realize their respective potential. Diversity comes at a cost. This cost includes the willingness to acknowledge the value of "other" ways of thinking and doing and the possibility of dealing with the complexity of life rather than simplifying it by creating ideological walls. I am not as optimistic as Brooks about the possible solution to the problem. He suggests that the simple act of "experiencing" the diversity of the human condition (for example, go to Branson, subscribe to *The Door*, go to a megachurch) might be the first step—like trying a new cuisine. Values, interests, and ways of thinking are not that easily modified. What is more likely to happen is that this cultural "slumming" will simply strengthen the ties to one's own group.

Frank Landy
Breckenridge, Colo.

Although David Brooks's analysis of Americans' segregationist impulses is largely on the mark, I can offer at least one example of hopeful integration. Brooks writes, "Maybe somewhere in this country there is a truly diverse neighborhood . . . But I have never been to or heard of that neighborhood." At least one neighborhood in Philadelphia—the district known as Mt. Airy—is such a place. According to the 2000 census, West Mt. Airy, where I live, is 44.8 percent black and 52 percent white. On my block, with fewer than two dozen homes, one can find straights, gays, blacks, whites, Hispanics, Asians, young families with children, and retired couples. Mt. Airy may be a rarity, but an appreciation of diversity—not as an abstraction but as a part of one's daily life—can demonstrably be the force that attracts people to a community and sustains its character, just as progressive mountain bikers find a home in Boulder.

Paul Waldman
Philadelphia, Pa.

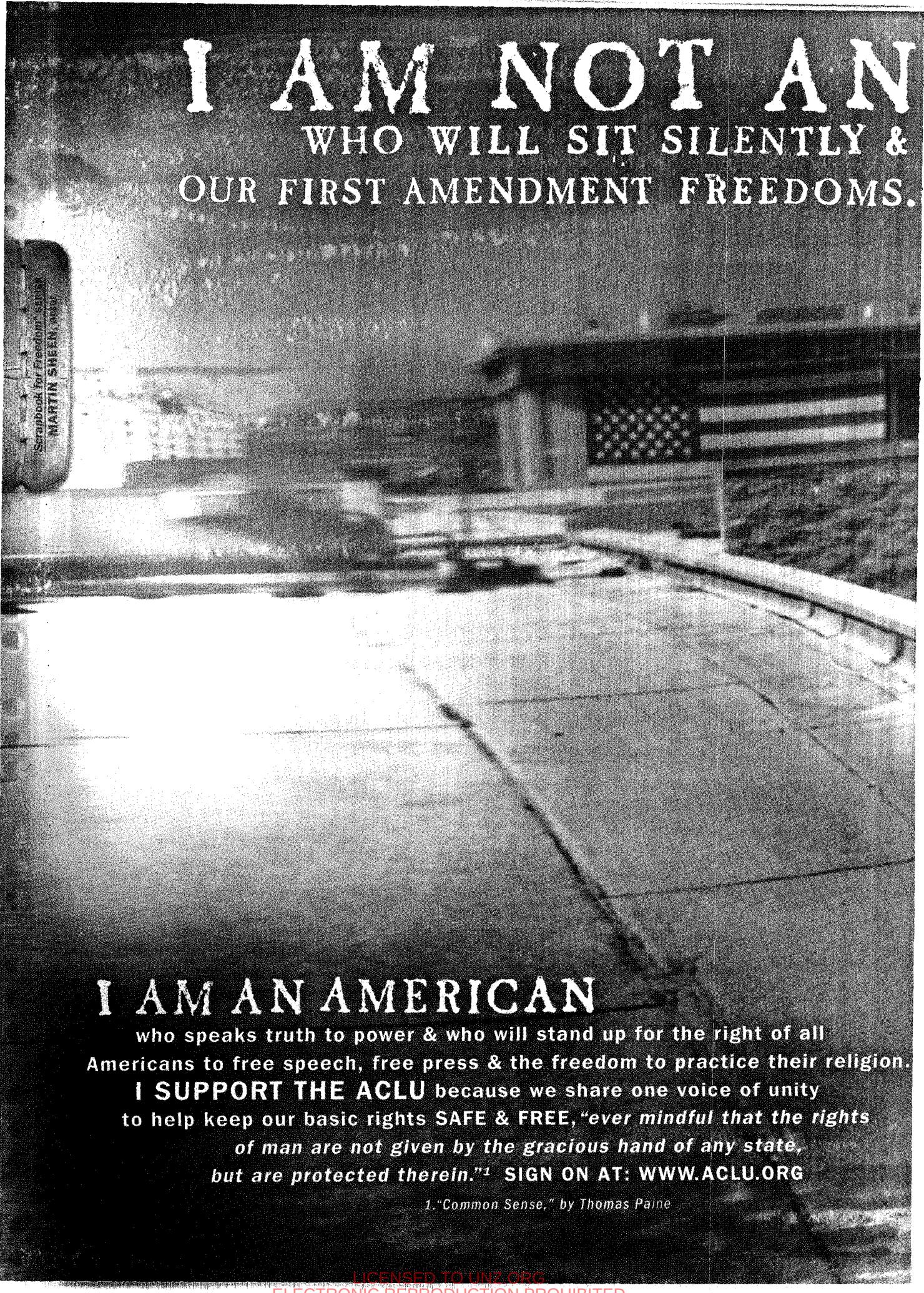
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1. "Common Sense," by Thomas Paine

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David Brooks asks that we sympathize with the poor, socially ostracized evangelical Christian who is not welcome in the halls of America's elite colleges and elsewhere. In laying out his case he makes the preposterous assertion "It's appalling that evangelical Christians are practically absent from entire professions, such as academia, the media, and filmmaking." I do not profess to be a great student of popular culture, but evangelical Christians seem to me to have in fact segmented the market just like any other interest group. The fundamentalists have their own universities, their own publishing industry (note the phenomenal success of the *Left Behind* series), their own bookstore chains, their own television networks and news programming, and thousands of small businessmen who use Christian symbols to advertise themselves to a like-minded customer base. Evangelicals are everywhere, and a lot of money is being made by these poor outcasts.

*Lorraine Smith
Pittsburgh, Pa.*

At Harvard in the 1950s, despite a wide-ranging effort to recruit students from many sources, I was one of less than a handful of students with a farm background. Equally sparse were evangelical Christians and political conservatives. The conformity cops were already in evidence: when the redoubtable scholar Mark DeWolfe Howe was invited to be faculty adviser to the college Republican Club, he responded that such a connection would do his career little good. Ultimately the dean's office allowed our club to function without the required adviser, possibly because it would have been embarrassing for the college that "broke McCarthyism at the stump" to have no one willing to advise Republicans.

As an academic in the late 1970s, I was told in several interviews that I was the ideal candidate for a job—if I were only a black female. I was in the job market because the university at which I had been teaching eliminated its medieval program in favor of something "more relevant." The designation "relevant" was dictated by administrators, not derived

from student enrollees. That is how I came to be a sawmill operator.

Again and again in academia I was advised to learn a new specialty in order to remain employable, adding expertise in, for instance, early slave narratives or the roots of jazz. But I had pursued, entirely on my own dime, a childhood love of Malory, Chaucer, and sagas. In our national rush to honor the roots of people concerning whom we feel guilty, we are as a nation ignoring our own cultural, political, and institutional roots. I am not sure the result will be a very good polity.

*Bruce P. Shields
Wolcott, Vt.*

David Brooks is certainly right that Americans tend to congregate with like-minded souls. But his examples all seem a little one-sided, suggesting that liberals are the ones who need to mingle with conservatives. I would suggest that the latter are no less in need of enlightenment. I count myself as liberal and progressive. I don't wear a sign, but I do wear Birkenstocks. Perhaps that's the giveaway, because on a trip through rural areas of Oregon last spring (areas that seemed quite conservative in culture) I was regarded with a suspicion that bordered on paranoia. Maybe the folks in Branson, Missouri, need to spend some time chatting with the folks in Boulder, Colorado. And how many liberal academics would be welcome at an evangelical Christian college? I'll venture a guess that their faculties are more "closed" than Princeton's. Everyone needs an open mind, not just liberals.

*Kate Shapiro
Julian, Calif.*

In his generally perceptive essay on diversity, David Brooks underestimates the extent to which patterns of residential segregation are matters of external circumstances rather than personal preference—in no respect more so than in the isolation of African-Americans. A large stack of solid research shows that if it were up to them, blacks would live in much more integrated neighborhoods than they do now. They—even middle-class blacks—

remain highly segregated because of continuing racial discrimination in housing and because most whites accept only token levels of residential mixing with blacks.

*Claude S. Fischer
University of California at Berkeley
Berkeley, Calif.*

David Brooks writes, "Brainy people with generally liberal social mores flow to academia, and brainy people with generally conservative mores flow elsewhere."

Although all generalizations are flawed, Brooks might consider the following, possibly more accurate underlying formulation: Brainy people pursuing knowledge flow to academia. Brainy people pursuing wealth flow to business.

*Jack Westman
Madison, Wis.*

David Brooks suggests that "any registered Republican who contemplates a career in academia these days is both a hero and a fool." Colleges and universities do not necessarily exclude conservatives in hiring. Equally likely is that the personal traits of heroism and foolishness that lead people to choose academic careers are more prevalent among liberals.

In most academic disciplines, especially the social sciences and humanities, salary prospects for professors are vastly lower than what similarly capable individuals with M.B.A.s, rather than specialized Ph.D.s, could earn in the private sector. Why do some people still choose academic careers? They do so either because of the perceived prestige of the professoriat or because of the satisfaction they derive from teaching, advising, and doing basic research. In exchange for personal satisfaction, academics compromise on salary.

This do-gooder's willingness to give up private gains for public benefits is a hallmark of liberal philosophy. Analogously, liberals tend to favor more taxation and greater public provision of goods and services. Conservatives prefer to keep more of their money for themselves, and to advocate less government involvement in everything. If you'd rather not give up potential earnings

in exchange for the opportunity to mold young minds and create new knowledge for society, and would prefer to take a greater percentage of your compensation in the form of money, you are likely to avoid academia.

The preponderance of liberals in our colleges and universities does not stem solely from the preferences of hiring committees. Even in the absence of any hiring-committee prejudices, potential professors do not randomly “flow into academia” or “flow elsewhere.” These are smart people, and they are more than able to compare the benefits and costs of different career choices and select the career option that most appeals to them. Academia tends to be more appealing to liberals.

*Trudy Ann Cameron
University of Oregon
Eugene, Ore.*

David Brooks is exactly right that people everywhere tend to group themselves according to common backgrounds and interests, and that this is a phenomenon less of snobbery than of people’s making life easier for themselves in an understandable way. But this tendency of human nature is precisely why a republic must work so hard to ensure that citizens of all backgrounds hold something in common that goes deeper than what they watch on TV or their opinion of motor homes. The veterans of World War II may not have returned to live harmoniously in a caste-free society, but they all acquired the humbling (and uplifting) sense that they were peers who sacrificed for their country. A similar experience is exactly the remedy for the relatively innocent stratification Brooks describes. This could come in state-based “militias,” where all young men and women of a certain age spent a year in tight, forced camaraderie, digging ditches, fighting fires and floods, and doing any other crucial grunt work of the moment. The important thing is that no one be exempt from the same regimen of sacrifice, hard work, and discipline for an entire year of his or her life. Back in civilian life, it’s a safe bet that Ivy Leaguers or Teamsters would once again cluster together—but perhaps with a greater degree of basic democratic re-

spect for their fellow Americans. In other words, promoting knowledge of one another’s diversity might be the best that a democratic society can do, short of actual “diversity,” and that’s certainly a step ahead of where we are now.

*Matt Struckmeyer
Palo Alto, Calif.*

Founders Chic

I enjoyed H. W. Brands’s attempt to demystify the Founding Fathers, bring them back to earth, and put them on a more properly sized pedestal (“Founders Chic,” September *Atlantic*). Remembering that they were real human beings, whose substantial mistakes haunted us later on, is crucial if we are to put our own challenges in perspective and recognize that we are just as able to muster what it takes to accomplish great things.

However, on the final page Brands posits the reaction that the Founders would most likely have toward several contemporary constitutional controversies, and I have to take serious issue with his supposition about one in particular: campaign-finance reform. He believes that “all the Founders would have been shocked at the overwhelming role of money in modern American politics.”

I haven’t run the numbers, but I suspect that campaign spending relative to per capita GDP in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries wasn’t nearly as far from today’s standard as Brands seems to believe. Additionally, congressional districts have astronomically increased in size and population. Candidates for the first Congress could personally meet and interact with a substantial number of their voters. At a minimum, the geography and limited population of the day meant that the vast majority of voters at least knew somebody who knew the would-be congressman very well, even if they didn’t know him personally. The opposite is true today, and that means a whole lot more money must be spent to introduce candidates to the electorate.

Toss in the added cost of running a presidential election across five time zones, and you start talking about real money.

And that’s just the beginning.

Remember also that U.S. senators were not popularly elected under the original version of the Constitution. Brands decries our contemporary timidity about altering the Constitution to address issues such as campaign spending, but he does not examine how this past modification affected that very issue. Leaving aside population and geographic growth, popular election of senators at least doubled the campaign activity and spending necessary to make representative government work at the congressional level.

Then there are the modern media: increasingly fractured, narrowly tailored, ever more expensive to use as an advertising tool, and absolutely essential for reaching a national audience. Brands nicely points out that Ben Franklin would be most impressed by the amazing technological advances of the modern world. I think Franklin would be pretty quick to add up the price of a thirty-second national TV spot, toss in the cost of the political consultants needed to solicit news coverage for a candidate on thousands of broadcast stations and publications, and then divide by the number of voters, concluding that the bill for seeking the presidency computes just about right.

Similar dynamics are at work all the way down the ballot, and you can also throw in the additional cost of running elections in the thirty-seven states that have been created since the Founders’ era (that’s seventy-four more U.S. Senate elections, if you’re keeping score).

My inclination is to believe that the Founders would be shocked by the sheer number and cost of perks for modern officeholders. Leaving aside the huge staffs at the federal level, many states now have well-compensated full-time legislators with individual support staffs and free office space. Beating them at the ballot box necessitates that a challenger counter all that taxpayer-subsidized name identification.

Ultimately, given the enormous size of the modern American economy, the cost of running elections is still a tiny fraction and a good bargain. The drafters of the Constitution could not possibly have envisioned the electoral system

that would be needed to serve such a huge and powerful nation, but they would have been hard pressed to create one that did the job any better, or with more resilience and dynamism, than what we now have. Indeed, even today I haven't seen anyone offer a persuasive alternative. This is one area in which we should put the Founders on a pedestal and admire their genius.

*Ken Braun
Lansing, Mich.*

As suggested in "Founders Chic," the American people ought to propose and discuss "bold," positive, and thoughtful constitutional amendments on the federal and state levels, and then allow them to proceed through the full public debate prescribed in the constitutional democratic procedures, taking their chances on success just as was done in 1787-1788 for the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and for proposed amendments since.

Likewise, the American Civil Liberties Union should use its ample energies and funds to do the same with changes that it espouses. The real complications and time involved in approving such amendments are purposeful and wholly sound.

What we should all now stop doing is using "judicial activism" in the courts to evade the proper constitutional-amendment procedures. The U.S. and state supreme courts should use due restraint when faced with issues and situations that suggest the need for fully considered constitutional amendments, and recuse themselves in favor of our prescribed and proven historical democratic processes. America will be all the better for it.

*John A. McVicker
Richmond, Va.*

Your September article by H. W. Brands usefully reminds us that the Founders were not as highly regarded by their contemporaries and some subsequent generations as they are now. But I disagree with his suggestion that they may not have been so exceptional after all.

Cast an eye over the history of American administrations, and you find a dreary succession of Pierces, Fillmores,

Clevelands, and Carters, rarely relieved by a towering figure like Lincoln. I can think of only two examples of an entire leadership cadre (as opposed to a solo act like Lincoln) that quite consciously set out on a historically important process of constructive statesmanship and carried it to success, both by the leaders' own standards and by the consensus of history. The Founders were the first, of course; the second was the remarkable generation—Marshall, Acheson, Kennan, Bohlen, and others—that fashioned the postwar settlements in Europe and Japan.

Those achievements are the more remarkable in the broader sweep of history when one considers how rarely the most talented leaders have applied themselves to positive statecraft rather than to conquest or personal aggrandizement.

*Charles R. Morris
New York, N.Y.*

I am unconvinced by H. W. Brands's attempt to take the Founders off their pedestal. He gives us some vituperations from contemporaneous political opponents, which should be beneath notice. And I can't seriously blame the Founders for failing to end slavery when their business was creating a new country on new principles—or for the undoubted imperfections here and there in their work.

Brands is more persuasive when he writes about defects in the Constitution that we cannot bring ourselves to see or to change. One great defect is that the mechanism for amendment is so difficult and cumbersome. This often drives reformers to seek backdoor amendments through court decisions. Another is that the mechanism for resolving disagreements about interpretations of the Constitution was not spelled out, leading to the slow growth of the doctrine that the Constitution means anything the Supreme Court says it means. The Founders would be heartbroken to find that the First Amendment has been twisted to protect pornographers and flag burners. They would be astounded to find that the Supreme Court has discovered a constitutional "right to privacy" that is simply not there.

We should remember that the Founders objected not to an aristocratic government but to an alien aristocracy of birth rather than a domestic one of merit. If Franklin wanted the President to serve without salary, as Brands writes, that means that Franklin wanted only independently wealthy men to be President.

*Roger Burk
Wallkill, N.Y.*

The Electoral College is undemocratic, H. W. Brands contends, and would not be included if the Constitution were written today. But imagine the 2000 election if the Electoral College did not exist. How quickly could the votes in fifty states have been counted, recounted, and counted again? You can be sure that in any state in which the vote was close, like Florida, the vote would be recounted ad nauseam, and we would still be complaining about the outcome. The value of the Electoral College is precisely in very close elections.

*Joyce Timm
Waretown, N.J.*

I suspect that H. W. Brands is correct in many ways when he suggests that we have gone a bit overboard in our reverence for the Founders. The way we "interpret" the Constitution is usually based on what we would like it to mean. That said, Brands makes one critical comment with which I take exception: "By the 1820s grave sins of omission hung ominously over the country: the Founders' failure to deal with slavery, and their failure to specify whether sovereignty lay with the states or with the nation."

I believe that some of the Founders (Adams and Franklin) wanted very much to outlaw slavery and also to have national sovereignty, whereas others, most notably Jefferson, would entertain no such thought. All preferred half a loaf to none at all. Had either school of thought chosen to press for a clear-cut statement, the Constitution could never have been passed by Congress, or ratified by the states. The Founders had to keep the desired end result—independence—as their primary goal, and

hope that succeeding generations would have the gumption to take care of the other issues. But for their perseverance we might today be British subjects—or, worse yet, French. Painful as it was, we have taken care of both issues.

Karl Holbrook
Eau Claire, Wis.

I disagree with H. W. Brands that “in revering the Founders we undervalue ourselves and sabotage our own efforts,” because in addition to personal background and training it will probably take an alarming crisis to bring out those leadership traits we so admire. Unfortunately, although troubling times make a great, readable history, I don’t know how many would actually want to live through them.

Don Ryan
Westborough, Mass.

H. W. Brands replies:

Ken Braun thinks America is getting good value for its campaign dollars and suggests that the Founders would think so too. I can’t disagree more. In the first place, the Founders didn’t envision a democracy, and therefore didn’t anticipate that candidates would have to be “introduced” to voters by the millions. Most of them assumed that the candidates would already be well known to the relatively few people able to vote. But even if they had envisioned our modern democracy, they would hardly have been happy with the enormous role of money in making it work. If the Founders agreed on one thing, it was the importance of civic virtue in a republic, and though—conceivably—some of them might have considered our current mode of campaign finance efficient, they wouldn’t have considered it virtuous. George Washington pressing the flesh at fundraisers? The mind boggles.

John McVickar dislikes what he calls “judicial activism.” The Founders probably would have disliked it too, but for a different reason. They had no idea the courts would become a branch of government co-equal to the legislative and executive branches; that was the work chiefly of John Marshall (whom Jefferson despised). But where most critics of judicial activism appeal to some “original intent,” on grounds that the Founders got it right and we shouldn’t mess with their work, they them-

selves would have rejected this notion for the ancestor worship it is.

Henry Adams asserted that “the progress of evolution from President Washington to President Grant was alone evidence enough to upset Darwin.” Charles Morris seems to agree. Yet Adams’s conclusion was—and mine is—that this demonstrates not that every subsequent generation was inferior to the Founding generation but that the most qualified individuals in the later generations didn’t go into politics. The question for our generation is how to get the best people to run for office. One way to start is to remove the prerequisite of being able to raise tens of millions of dollars.

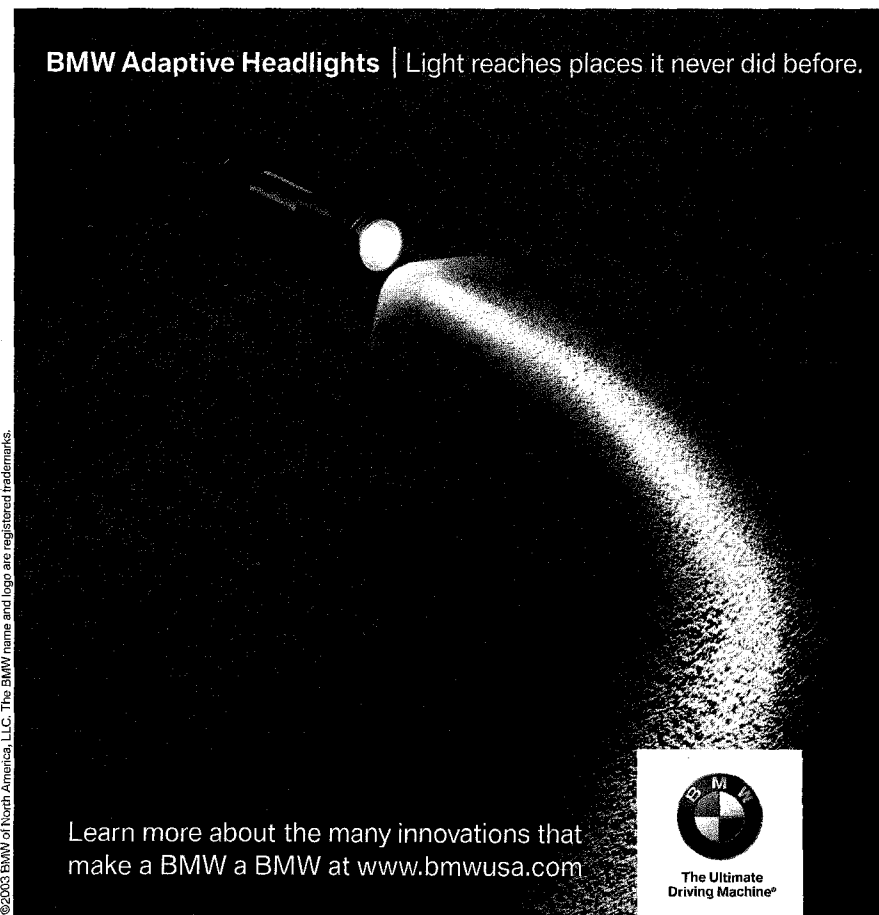
Roger Burk says that Franklin wanted only financially independent men to be President. True enough. Franklin believed they would be less corruptible—in all senses of the word—than those who still had to earn their living. Two centuries of American practice haven’t proved him wrong. The Founders might well have been astounded to see the First Amendment sheltering pornographers; but they would have been less upset at its protection of flag

burners, because they had considerably less reverence for the flag than we do. As for a right to privacy, it’s difficult—for me, at any rate—to read the Bill of Rights and not conclude that an underlying right to be left alone by government is just what they had in mind. This was much of what these Lockean fought their revolution for.

Joyce Timm suggests that the Electoral College protects us from unending recounts. Maybe not. It is the very rare presidential election that is really close in the popular vote. In the narrowest popular tally in the past hundred years (1960), John Kennedy beat Richard Nixon by more than 100,000 votes. What makes recounts tempting under our current system is that a handful of votes in a swing state can deliver a grossly incommensurate number of electoral votes. In 2000 Gore won by 540,000 votes nationwide; there would have been no recount.

Karl Holbrook thinks I’m too hard on the Founders for not ending slavery and not making clear where sovereignty lay. Perhaps so, but my point was less to criticize them than to challenge the notion that they got nothing wrong. Having said that,

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I still wish the opponents of slavery had pushed harder at Philadelphia in 1787 to end not only the slave trade but slavery itself. Slave traders were given twenty years to recoup their investments; a similar sunset arrangement—perhaps lasting the life of persons then enslaved—might have been devised for the underlying institution. It would have been difficult, but far less difficult and costly than the method that finally settled the issue in the 1860s.

Don Ryan makes a good point that the qualities we admire in the Founders were elicited by the crisis through which they lived. It's worth remembering, though, that they brought most of the crisis upon themselves. There didn't have to be an American Revolution; Samuel Adams, James Otis, and the others might have paid their stamp taxes and sipped their East India Company tea, and America might have acquired independence slowly, the way Canada did. As a longtime admirer of our northern neighbors, I can imagine worse scenarios. One positive side effect might have been the peaceful elimination of slavery (accomplished in the British Empire in the 1830s).

Housewife Confidential

As an “at-home” mom, I read with great interest and enjoyment Caitlin Flanagan’s article “Housewife Confidential” (September *Atlantic*). My only problem with this article is that it perpetuates common misrepresentations of *The Feminine Mystique*.

I, like most of my generation, had heard an awful lot about this book and thought I knew its message without actually reading it. From reading this article, I suspect that Flanagan falls into this category as well. Her references to this book seem to include it as part of the “standard [feminist] cant,” with an emphasis on career and disdain for housewifery that this article criticizes. In fact (as I now know, thanks to my book club) the bulk of the article actually echoes and supports much of what *The Feminine Mystique* says.

For instance, Flanagan writes,

The general idea ... is that shortly after President Truman dropped the big one on Nagasaki, an entire generation of brave, brilliant women ... was kidnapped by a bunch of rat-bastard

men, deposited in Levittown, and told to mop. That women in large numbers were eagerly, joyfully complicit in this life plan, that women helped to create the plan, is rarely considered.

That may be true of what many zealous feminists, past and present, have reported, but their stimulus was probably not *The Feminine Mystique*, which devotes a full chapter to the subject and supports Flanagan’s conclusion that after the war both men and women actively embraced the ideal represented by Ward and June Cleaver. It was the eventual failure of this so-called “ideal life” to fulfill women that led to the “problem without a name” that Betty Friedan documented.

Flanagan also presents us with a short description of the life of Erma Bombeck, as a counterargument to the narrative of oppression and boredom imposed by the women’s movement (to paraphrase Flanagan). However, Bombeck’s life as presented in this article seems to repeat precisely the pattern recognized and documented in *The Feminine Mystique*: the career paths available before the war; the postwar dream of marriage, family, and home life that did not include career; the subsequent boredom and dissatisfaction: “Finally ... those dreams [of husband, child, house in the suburbs] came true. And she began to go absolutely bonkers.” The fact that Bombeck found fulfillment when she began to write again (and, interestingly, that her writing was limited to the subject of housewifery) is fully in keeping with the insights of *The Feminine Mystique*.

Jennifer Vornvas
East Norwich, N.Y.

Caitlin Flanagan’s otherwise warm and insightful piece on housewives and at-home moms is marred by her repeated flailing at feminist straw men (okay, straw women). The feminists and working mothers I know have a far more nuanced appreciation of their own housewifely mothers, their at-home peers, and even Erma Bombeck, than Flanagan evinces in return. This is not a story that needs a villain.

Allan Fisher
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Caitlin Flanagan’s paean to Erma Bombeck is very misleading in one way: the at-home lifestyle Flanagan touts is one that she is able to lead without sacrificing as most at-home parents do.

By describing herself as an at-home parent, Flanagan pointedly positions herself in contrast to working parents. Note, however, that she writes magazine articles for pay, in addition to caring for her children. Some would argue that this does not fit the definition of at-home parent and that Flanagan is a parent who works from home. (Does this definition make me an at-home parent from five o’clock to eight o’clock each evening?) Even if you reject this argument, it’s certainly true that she has taken on the mantle of at-home parent while avoiding loss of her career, her current personal income and potential future earnings, her Social Security set-asides, her outside intellectual stimulation, and her professional standing. For someone with a paycheck and a career of her own to regularly imply that housewifery is bliss itself is not just misleading, it’s insulting. I wonder why Flanagan insists on claiming this at-home parent status. Could it be that she knows it gives her credibility? In reality she’s taking credit for the sacrifices other people have made—and then wondering aloud why some at-home parents are so angry.

Jennifer Debner
Chicago, Ill.

I have just finished reading Caitlin Flanagan’s article on Erma Bombeck and other women who wrote on the theme of running a home and raising children during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. I was excited to read the article, because it covers a subject dear to me (I am thirty-three years old but first read *The I Hate to Cook Book* as a small child, and re-read it still). I really enjoyed the piece—but I wonder: Why didn’t Flanagan cite Shirley Jackson’s real masterpiece, *Life Among the Savages*? *Raising Demons* is its sequel; *Life Among the Savages* was published in book form in 1953 (four years before *Raising Demons* and *Please Don’t Eat the Daisies*), after appearing as articles in *Charm*, *Collier’s*,

Good Housekeeping, *Harper's*, *Mademoiselle*, *Woman's Day*, and *Woman's Home Companion*. To not mention that title is a real oversight, and I am confident that other *Atlantic* readers will be as pained as I am by this title's going unmentioned in this otherwise wonderful article.

Eva Geertz
New Haven, Conn.

Caitlin Flanagan replies:

I'm sure that Jennifer Vomvas and her book group read The Feminine Mystique closely, and that they found in it—as I did when I first read it, more than twenty years ago—a sympathetic account of how the World War II generation arrived at its decisions about family life. If she had read my essay as closely, she would have seen that it attributes the current prevailing attitudes about post-war housewives not to Betty Friedan but, rather, to certain contemporary writers and filmmakers. Further, Ms. Vomvas suggests that Erma Bombeck's life stands as an enduring tribute to the wisdom of The Feminine Mystique. I'm not so sure. In her book Friedan describes the great housewife writers as being "like Uncle Tom, or Amos and Andy" (as the book group may have noticed, The Feminine Mystique never rings a bell if a gong is handy; in it Friedan devotes a chapter to comparing middle-class American housewives to concentration-camp victims, an analogy so ghastly that she apologizes for it in her 2000 autobiography, Life So Far). In fact, Bombeck always humorously maintained that she owed her career to an unpleasant encounter with Friedan. In 1964 she and a group of her friends went to hear the famous author give a speech; to their dismay, Friedan harangued them and insulted their lives. Bombeck went on to read The Feminine Mystique, in which she found her favorite housewife writers similarly maligned. Just a few weeks later she began her incomparable career.

And the rest, as Allan Fisher might say, is her story.

I think Jennifer Debner's comments are intended to make me feel bad—but they've had the opposite effect. Apparently, I—alone of all my sex—am having it all! Bless her for giving me this agreeable new perspective. Eva Geertz is quite right that Life Among the Savages was published before Raising Demons, although I'm not sure leaving it unmentioned was an "oversight."

E.T. and God

Paul Davies's "E.T. and God" (September *Atlantic*) was thoughtful but completely wrong when arguing that the discovery of extraterrestrial life would undermine Christianity's conception of God's special relationship with man. Discovery of alien life would profoundly, perhaps brutally, reiterate Christian doctrines.

First, Christians learn in Genesis that God gave mankind stewardship over the earth, not the cosmos. Christians believe that man is the highest creation on earth, not that he is the highest creation. There are higher beings who sometimes have served as God's messengers, or angels, to man.

Second, Christianity recognizes Jesus as God, man, and savior. But this special relationship between God and man does not rule out the existence of life on other planets, nor would it require, as Davies suggests, the existence of "saviors" for other species of intelligent life. Christians understand that God gave Jesus to humanity because humanity was a fallen species, not a successful species.

For Christians and Jews, the natural, incarnate world is the first revelation of God's existence. This revelation is more persuasive when the universe is encountered as generously made, with laws that continue to confound and amaze us as they are discovered. Davies's skeptics describe a "God of the gaps," who is squeezed out by man's growing knowledge, but Christians worship a God who grants man a widening light of understanding—and a growing circle of darkness, wonder, and mystery.

The discovery of an intelligent alien race would be an opportunity for enlightenment and error. The first question would be whether this race had escaped the same fall from grace that mankind had experienced. Other questions would follow. What could mankind learn of creation and the Creator from the aliens, and what might man share in turn? As with every discovery, the aliens would also pose new opportunities for error and sin, but nothing would change Christian doctrine on man's relationship with God.

The discovery of extraterrestrials will undermine pride, not faith. Power, prima-

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cy, and pride were the temptations faced by Jesus Christ, and these are inherent, recurring temptations for mankind. History, however, is a long lesson that Christians worship a God "not of this world," whose "ways are not man's ways."

Christianity has coped with many events that dismayed its adherents, including the discoveries of evolution and orbital mechanics, the invention of the printing press, the postponement of the Second Coming, the fall of imperial Rome, and the Resurrection. It is the secular humanists, I submit, who will be most challenged and overawed by extraterrestrial life.

Gerald E. Nora
Vernon Hills, Ill.

Paul Davies fails utterly to fathom the cosmic inclusiveness of Christianity. For Christians, the central religious metaphor is a crucifixion. God is decisively "personified" for us in the narrative of a human being bleeding and dying on a cross for the sake of both friend and enemy. The greatest of Christian theologians have long recognized that the Crucifixion requires neither recurrence nor reinterpretation for its significance and consequence to be manifested in other cultures, other worlds, and other creatures we may encounter. A love that bleeds for us, the Bible affirms, bleeds for all creation and never ceases such self-oblation. As Pascal wrote, "Christ will be in agony until the end of the world."

The Crucifixion is thus not some mechanical salvific transaction. The Anglican Bishop John Robinson rightly maintained, "The New Testament does not affirm that in Christ our salvation 'becomes possible.' It affirms, rather, that in him what has always been possible now 'becomes manifest' in the sense of being decisively presented in a human [life]."

Davies distorts Christianity by insisting, too, that by its lights God's saving love is limited to human beings: "Jesus Christ was humanity's savior and redeemer. He did not die for the dolphins or the gorillas, and certainly not for the proverbial little green men." This is simply misguided. "Incarnation is the manner and mode of all of God's work in His world," Cardinal Berulle wrote, adding, "The incarnation is the

condition, the work and the mystery wherein God reigns and whereby he reigns in His creatures." (Note: "creatures," not "human beings.")

Likewise a Protestant theologian: "The whole is Incarnation ... The doctrine of the Incarnation must be set in the context of a world order which is a manifestation of God, in all the stages of its evolution."

Davies reveals, finally, a surprising ignorance that these comprehensive, cosmic themes are not simply the development of later theology but are often quite explicit in the New Testament. Saint Paul, in the Epistle to the Colossians, for example, affirmed that in and through God's self-offering love, "all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Colossians 1:16-17)

"In Him all things (all creatures) cohere." Christianity may not always live up to this utterly inclusive theology, but if it is faithful to the biblical witness, it should expect to encounter the same loving, "bleeding" Creator deeply incarnate in alien cultures and extraterrestrial intelligence.

The Reverend Nils Blatz
The Church of the Redeemer
Mattituck, N.Y.

In his book *Cosmos* (1980), Carl Sagan says, "There are some hundred billion galaxies each with on the average a hundred billion stars, there are perhaps as many planets as stars ... it seems to me that the universe is brimming over with life." To Christians this is a bizarre idea. Ten million Crucifixions on ten million planets does not fit with the spirit of the New Testament. Paul Davies attempts to find a fit. He does admit that Buddhists and Hindus would not be threatened by the prospect of advanced aliens, owing to their pluralistic concept of God. But he gets his reasoning wrong. The religions of Buddha and Lao-Tze and the Jina are godless religions—any god is decisively rejected. No gods, no problems with aliens. Davies also implies that some sort of spirituality, some religious feeling,

seems to be a part of human nature. On the contrary, it is the absence of natural belief that has led to the attempt to "prove" beliefs. And "proof" is what Davies attempts. He invokes astrobiology and a so-called revamped design argument and says, "The more one accepts the formation of life as a natural process ... the more ingenious and contrived (dare one say designed?) the universe appears to be." He forgets that a religious leader (I know not from what planet) warned, "One does not pour new wine into old skins."

Marvin Jacoby
Incline Village, Nev.

Paul Davies assumes that intelligent extraterrestrials (ETIs) would of necessity function morally as human beings. That is, the lives of ETIs would be characterized by deceit, anger, greed, and the like. But what if these beings never "sinned"? What if the whole concept of salvation were to them a foreign and totally unnecessary idea? What if the earth is populated with the only creatures in the universe actually requiring redemption? Imagine us inhabiting a fallen world on the wrong side of the cosmic tracks, and the rest of the universe considering it wisdom to leave us alone, effectively quarantining Mother Earth. This idea of humanity's sinfulness being both alarming and unique is the thesis of C. S. Lewis's remarkable trilogy, written half a century ago.

Another speculation of Davies's centers on the supposed limitations of Christianity with regard to evangelism of other sentient species. According to this view, Christianity is too parochial, too earth-centered, to even consider such a possibility. Basic Christian doctrine, in fact, teaches its followers that one non-human, wise, and powerful species shares the universe with us, and is devoid of a savior. This population is the angels, good and bad. The majority of the angels exist sinlessly and need no salvation. For those angels who "fell" there is no remedy, and they remain forever cursed by their Creator. Humanity's opportunity for redemption is especially dear when viewed from the angelic perspective.

Samuel V. Rowe
Fort Pierce, Fla.

Paul Davies says that the discovery of a more spiritually advanced species might prove problematic for the Christian doctrine of atonement, and as far as most creedal Christians are concerned, this may well be so. But at least for Latter-day Saints (Mormons) this needn't be a problem. Although it is not necessarily an official doctrine, many Mormons believe that other universes have existed, are probably in existence now, and may exist in the future. They believe that Jesus Christ's atonement was infinite over time and space, probably "covering" those other universes as well. Some debate the issue, and plenty speculate, but the question is at least asked. This may be because Latter-day Saints are not "Biblicist," or bound to believe in an inerrant Bible, as many conservative Protestants are. I also suspect that liberal Protestants and Catholics would accommodate in fairly short order as well to the discovery of such a species. The only area that might be problematic for Latter-day Saints is that we believe we are literally in God's image, rejecting the amorphous God as a Hellenistic accretion during the centuries following the apostolic era—and are therefore of the same "species," although, as Davies points out, if the universe follows the anthropic principle, we may all be of a family, and a this-worldly biological term like "species" would obviously be anachronistic. Perhaps a term like "meta-species" would have to be coined for such a transcendent and all-encompassing relationship.

*Marc A. Schindler
Spruce Grove, Alberta*

Although Paul Davies reports that some non-Christian religions have long settled the matter of extraterrestrial life, at least one Christian denomination also has room for such a discovery—the fast-growing Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (whose members many refer to as Mormons). As a longtime member of that Church, I have been taught from my childhood not only that intelligent extraterrestrial life exists, but that God created those beings for the same purpose he created us—"to bring to pass

the immortality and eternal life" of his children, as Mormon Scripture puts it. God's creations living on other planets also have souls to be saved. The notion that Jesus Christ's sacrifice could extend beyond this world (and, indeed, resurrect our planet's dolphins and gorillas in a zoophilic heaven) is not troubling to a faith that believes that his atonement is both infinite and eternal—far surpassing the limits of an earthbound humanity. Instead of being a theological challenge, the discovery of extraterrestrial life would likely support Mormons' esteem of the faith's nineteenth-century founder, Joseph Smith. This wouldn't be the first astronomical finding to uphold Smith's views. "Worlds without number have I created," Mormon Scripture records God as saying—a statement published generations before the current flood of discovered extrasolar planetary systems. Although astronomers contemptuous of religion would surely have no truck with the Mormons' nineteenth-century farmer-prophet, the irony is that their discoveries make both Smith's version of the

universe and his vision of Christianity more relevant rather than less.

*Sean Ransom
Tampa, Fla.*

I enjoyed immensely the thought-provoking "E.T. and God." However, I take exception to Paul Davies's statement "It is more likely that any civilization that had surpassed us scientifically would have improved on our level of moral development, too." Although I would certainly share Davies's hope that would be the case, I see nothing in our modern world that suggests we have developed morally in proportion to our scientific development. In fact, I think an argument could be made that the opposite is true. Davies reveals one of the flaws in the scientific approach to theology when he speculates that "an advanced alien society would sooner or later find some way to genetically eliminate evil behavior, resulting in a race of saintly beings." What is so saintly about a life devoid of evil behavior in a world where there is no evil behavior? Surely Davies does not think that

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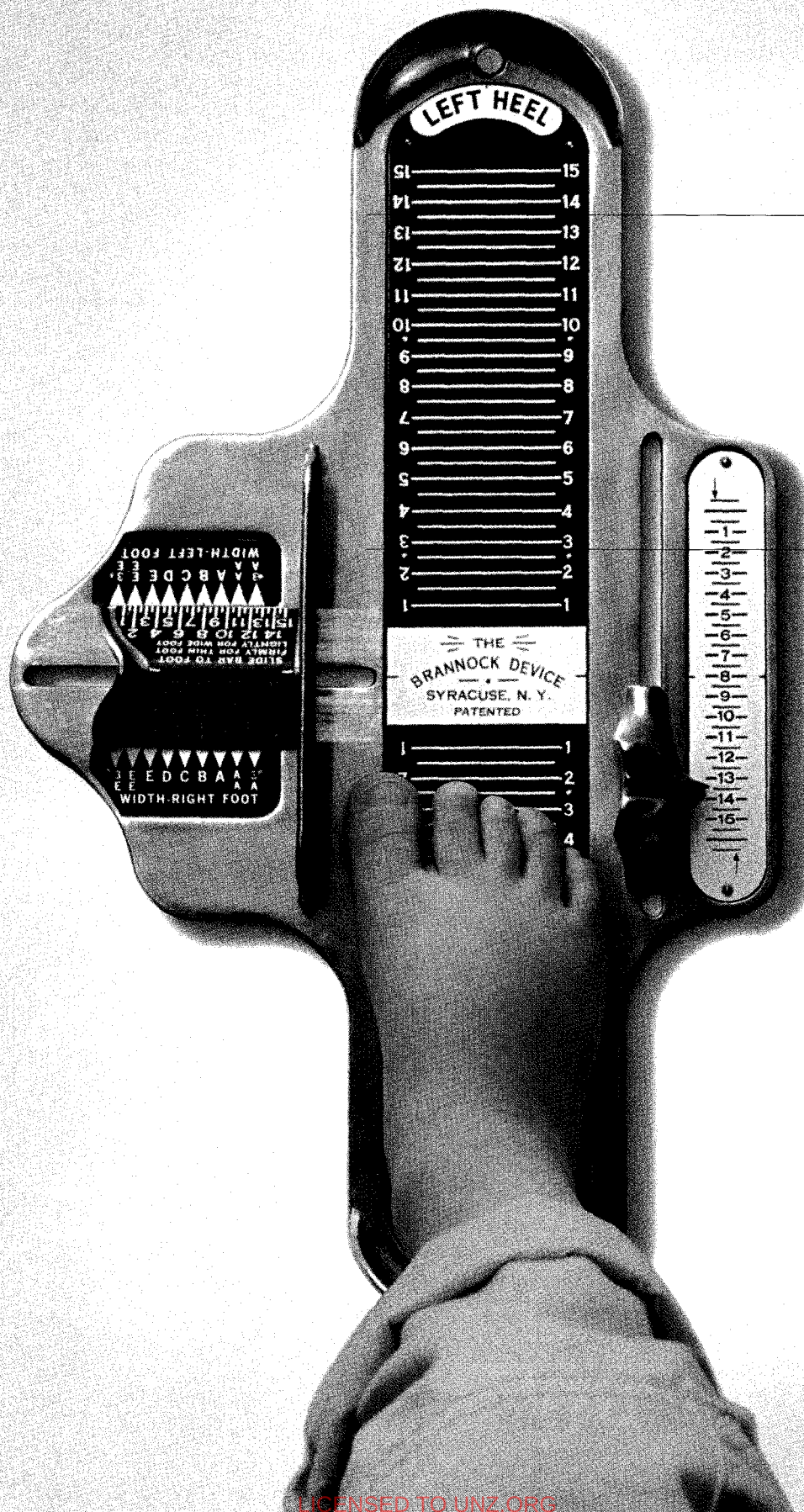


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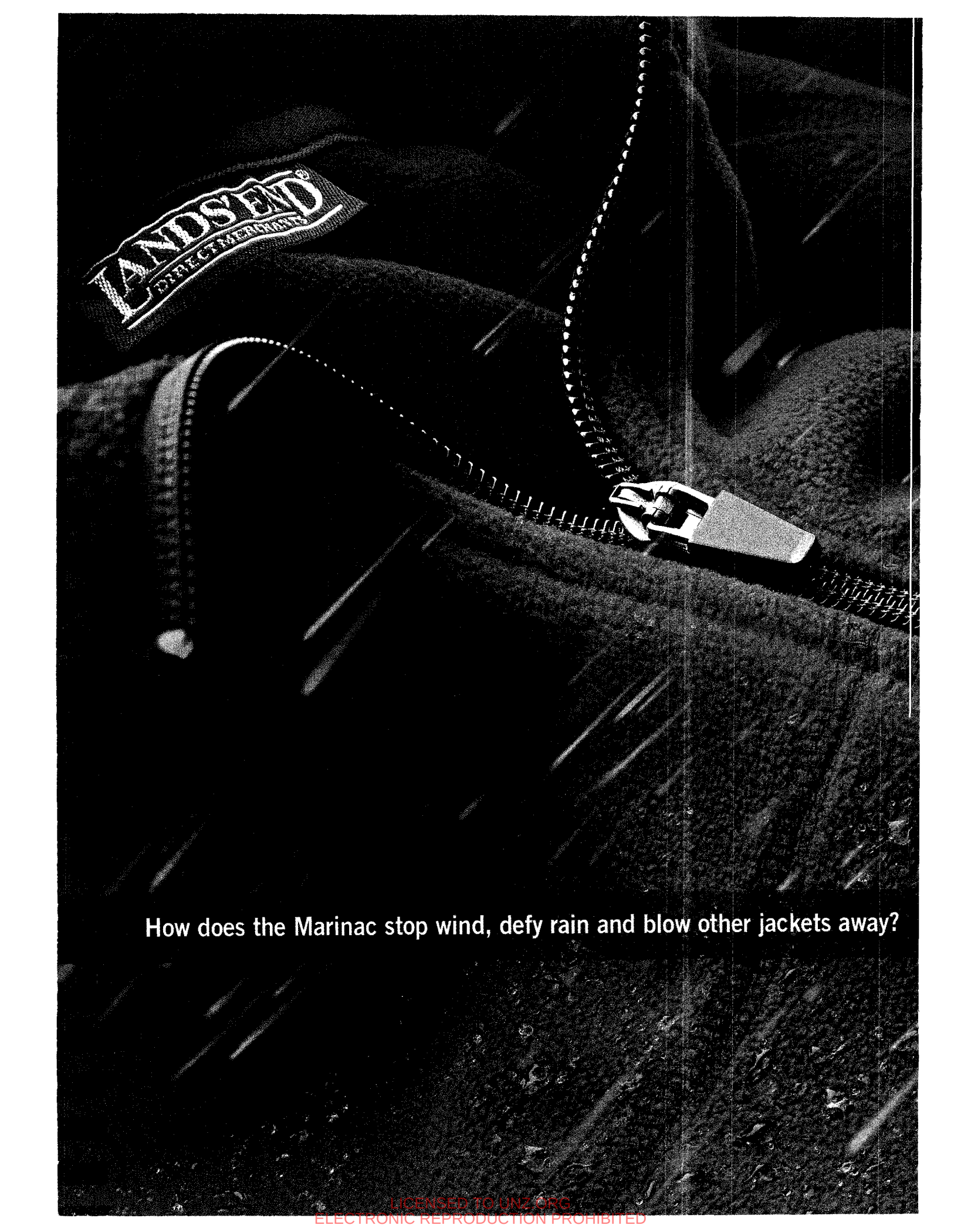
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a world without evil behavior is reflective of the deepest human aspirations. I shudder at the thought of who is going to decide what evil behavior to genetically eliminate. I am afraid that Davies expresses too great a confidence in science and its role.

*Keith Hamilton
Chicago, Ill.*

Paul Davies makes a common but crucial mistake in "E.T. and God" when he states that Christianity is concerned only about the salvation of human beings. Christianity teaches that Jesus Christ died for human beings to save them from sin, in order that they might participate in the redeemed new creation. In other words, God does not save human beings from creation; God is saving his creation including sinful humanity. God loves the cosmos (John 3:16); in Jesus Christ, God reconciles the cosmos to himself (Corinthians 5:9); Jesus Christ reconciles to God all things on earth in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:10). All things in heaven and on earth would certainly include dolphins and gorillas and even the proverbial green men.

Davies concludes with an apt reference to Giordano Bruno. Bruno was infamously killed because he taught that scientific discovery would bring about the demise of Christianity and the revival of the cult of the Sun God Ra. Is there not an echo of this assertion in this article?

*The Reverend David H. Miley
Rock Island, Ill.*

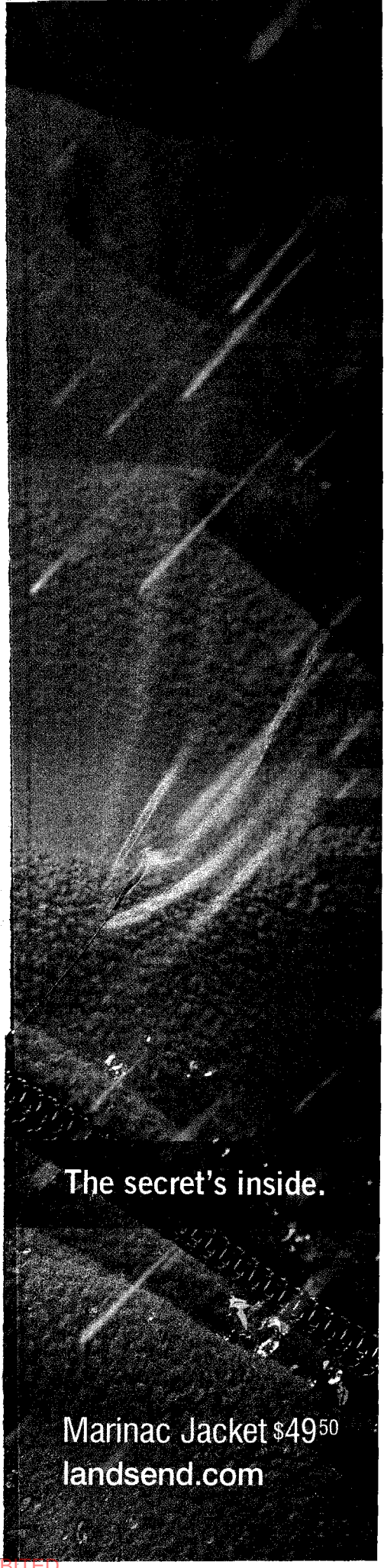
Extraterrestrial intelligent beings: they would certainly create a greater theological controversy than current debates over gay bishops in the Episcopal Church or women and noncelibate priests in the clergy of the Catholic Church. However, Christian churches would have—by thinking outside the box or the Bible—at least one powerful argument to support themselves in the face of such a discovery. Of course, the discovery of ETI beings would have to be proved beyond any doubt, preferably in person, before Church authorities would have to respond with this view.

At the time of Jesus's Crucifixion no one in the Roman Empire, I dare say, knew of the existence of human beings in China and the Far East, let alone in the undiscovered continents of the Americas, the islands of Polynesia, the continent of Australia, and numerous unvisited places in Africa. For nearly another fifteen centuries (which may have seemed as long a duration as light-years seem to us) many of these peoples would remain as unknown to Christians as extraterrestrial life is to us. Following the explorers' discovery of these lands and peoples, Christian missionaries provided the Gospels to the natives. Jesus did not have to be crucified and resurrected in person again for each of these peoples to provide their souls with the means toward salvation, any more than the billions of earthlings who have been born after the first generation of Christians have required personal witness to his teachings and Crucifixion. In fact, Christian theology has already had to deal with the problems of all the people who died before Jesus's appearance as well as all those people who have died since the preaching of the New Testament without ever having had an opportunity to even hear the Gospels. Basically, future Christians facing ETI beings can take the example of their predecessors, the Jews, and claim to be God's chosen people, and offer ETI beings the good news of salvation—assuming they don't already have their own messiah and revealed word of God. In the latter case another clash of faiths may emerge.

*Patrick Ivers
Laramie, Wyo.*

The discovery of intelligent life with foreign belief systems has already occurred many times here on earth. At least among cosmopolitan human beings, religions are learning from and adapting to one another. When Jews, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and the odd scientist break bread together and seek understanding (alas, too rarely), how would it be different to include E.T.?

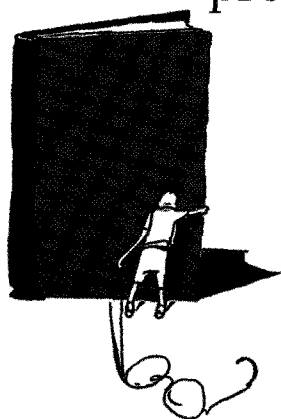
*Martin S. Ewing
Branford, Conn.*



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One point that Paul Davies could have emphasized is the relative rarity (based on our current knowledge) of the conditions (and sequence of conditions) required for the formation and evolution of intelligent life and the development of a technological civilization. Consider, for example, how earthly evolution was affected by asteroid impacts. This in turn suggests that the likelihood of there being such a civilization close enough to us in space and time to make its presence known is exceedingly remote, SETI efforts to the contrary notwithstanding. Accordingly, if I were a Christian theologian, I would not be overly concerned about the possibility. For all practical purposes, we indeed may be alone in the universe.

*Bob Ringland
Del Mar, Calif.*

Paul Davies posits that the discovery of alien life—especially nonhuman sentients—might occasion a crisis of faith among the religiously minded. It happens that first-contact scenarios are a staple of science fiction, and an exhaustive collective effort has been made to examine almost every conceivable first-contact problem, not excepting spiritual ones. For example, in his essays C. S. Lewis considered many of the problems Davies raises and also penned novels around some of them (*Out of the Silent Planet*, 1938; *Perelandra*, 1943).

Aliens might be fallen or unfallen. If fallen, their fall could take a form different from man's, and so too with their redemption. Several stories deal with the spiritual aspects of first contact by sending priests along with explorers. Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *The Mote in God's Eye* (1974) takes this approach. The exemplar of this literature is James Blish's *A Case of Conscience* (1958), in which the Jesuit member of a survey crew struggles with the question of whether there can be goodness without God, and what obligations are imposed on Christians confronted with evidence thereof. Roger Zelazny's *A Rose for Ecclesiastes* (1963) describes the influence that human religious thought might have on an alien race. Closer to home, Lewis's friend J.R.R.

Tolkien, in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) and *The Silmarillion* (1977), described earthbound sentients who are spiritually aware but not gifted with immortal souls. A fair amount of science fiction also deals with this problem in artificial intelligence. An early and amusing example is Anthony Boucher's *The Quest for Saint Aquin* (1951).

The fact that these scenarios have been considered doesn't mean that there would not be any crisis of the sort that Davies posits, but it does suggest that there would be a reserve of spiritually minded people—in addition to Davies and his readers—who have considered these issues and have a certain comfort level with them. In this I suspect that spiritual crises are much like other crises—some people find ways to accommodate the problem within their existing mental framework, whereas others abandon that framework. Moreover, since science-fiction writers do not shy away from any aspects of alien contact (the aliens, it is said, generally come to save you or to eat you), it is interesting that these stories often end optimistically from the point of view of the person of faith, suggesting a strain of religious thinkers who would be as excited by a first contact as their less adaptable co-religionists would be disturbed.

*Vince Billock
Dayton, Ohio*

Four More Years

In response to Patrick J. Buchanan's remark that few Americans would call for Howard Dean in the event of "some terrorist horror on the scale of 9/11" ("Four More Years?" September *Atlantic*), I would like to point out that the majority of Americans didn't call for George W. Bush, emergency or not, and for many of us the "tough guys who win wars" have been nothing short of a disaster. The admiration for tough guys that Buchanan claims Americans possess reminds me of lines from Sylvia Plath: "Every woman adores a Fascist / The boot in the face ..." To me and many others, a truly tough guy wouldn't have responded as Bush and his colleagues have.

Buchanan is ostensibly undertaking a dispassionate survey of the political landscape, but by reducing the vast problem of terrorism to the level of a schoolyard fight, he achieves the larger goal of marginalizing opponents of Bush's "war on terror." I think what Buchanan is saying is that he believes Americans prefer simplistic answers to complex problems. Some Americans may have this preference, but for those of us who don't (and whose voices on this subject are largely ignored), I would like to point out that in the event of an emergency, many Americans would like to call out, "Get me Howard Dean!"

*Bill McClanahan
San Francisco, Calif.*

In "Four More Years," Patrick Buchanan states that history (among other factors) makes the defeat of George W. Bush in 2004 appear "improbable." I think he ignores some other historical data, which—should history repeat itself—would show Al Gore defeating Bush by a resounding margin.

Bush is the third direct descendant of a former President to be elected—the first two having been John Quincy Adams and Benjamin Harrison. All three were elected despite losing the popular vote. Both Adams and Harrison were soundly beaten for re-election by the popular-vote winners they defeated.

Look at more similarities. The 1824 election was a four-way race, and Adams was second to Andrew Jackson, who did not have enough Electoral College votes. This sent the decision to the House of Representatives. Henry Clay, who finished third, threw his support to Adams, and was thereby appointed Secretary of State.

The 1888 election, between Harrison and Cleveland, was probably the most corrupt in history, with allegations of vote buying and more. Cleveland won the popular vote by a majority of 90,000, but Harrison prevailed in the Electoral College.

We know that a large majority of Gore supporters believe that the 2000 election was stolen. Gore has an-

nounced that he will not run in 2004—but here are even more precedents for his not only winning but becoming a two-term President. He will have dodged a problem by losing in 2000, because sitting Vice Presidents who are elected usually serve only one term.

*Phyllis Humphrey
Oceanside, Calif.*

Pat Buchanan replies:

Bill McClanahan, his mind clouded by his dislike of the President, both misstates the facts and misses my point.

First, the war on terror, in which George W. Bush is commander-in-chief, is an undeniable success. Al-Qaeda has been decimated and run out of Afghanistan; many of its leaders and soldiers have been arrested or killed; and not a single act of terror has been perpetrated on U.S. soil since 9/11. If that's not success, what is? If the President has blundered, it was in launching an unnecessary war in Iraq, which I opposed.

Second, McClanahan says I reduce "the vast problem of terrorism to the level of a schoolyard fight." False. I simply make the



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point, with which few analysts disagree, that a President perceived as tough will almost surely benefit in the face of a foreign attack late in an election. JFK's defiant stand in the Cuban missile crisis ended Republican hopes for gains that fall. In the first months of the Iranian hostage crisis the nation rallied behind Commander-in-Chief Jimmy Carter, enabling him to easily dispatch Senator Ted Kennedy, who had been running ahead of him. If Howard Dean is nominated, McClanahan had best pray that al-Qaeda does not perpetrate some horror in late October of 2004—or Howard is toast.

As for Phyllis Humphrey, her history is good up to a point. John Adams's son and William Henry Harrison's grandson did each serve but one term, but the latter was defeated by a hugely popular former President Grover Cleveland, and the former was defeated by the foremost hero of that day, who had not only routed the British at New Orleans but also stolen Florida from Spain. Sorry, Phyllis, but Al—whatever he did for the Internet—does not call to mind that earlier Tennessean Andrew Jackson.

Edward Said

As an anthropologist who teaches about the Middle East and Orientalism, I found Christopher Hitchens's review of Edward Said's *Orientalism* ("Where the Twain Should Have Met," September *Atlantic*) bizarre in its opacity. It is Hitchens who missed an opportunity to do what he wants Said to do—shed some insight on cultural-political interactions. But Said's task was of a different sort—to understand why such a dialogue has not been possible. Said observes the West observing the East: "The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its oldest and most recurring images of the Other."

The Middle East and North Africa have been and are still colonized by Euro-Americans extracting natural resources, displacing peoples, erasing traditions and histories, causing destruction. The reverse has not been true. Said cannot "negotiate" these power disparities.

He can only discover the intellectual traditions that foster an idea of the Orient as being other than the Occident—unchanging, mysterious, childlike, inferior. That negative images are found mirrored in both East and West is not relevant to the Orientalist construction of positional superiority, especially when it is backed in practice by superior technologies.

The trouble with Hitchens is that he is stuck in his own partial, confused understanding of present-day Iraq. His zeal leads him to make absurd statements, such as "Saddam Hussein was better able to force himself on my attention than I ever was to force myself on his," without seeming to understand that he can thank U.S. foreign policy for supporting Hussein's brutal regime. Zeal causes him to ignore facts about the alliance of exiled dissidents with covert CIA monies in the 1990s, and his self-confessed lack of Middle Eastern scholarship makes him vulnerable to a charge of glib personality polemics.

Laura Nader
Berkeley, Calif.

In his article about the supposed failure of Edward Said to mediate properly between East and West, Christopher Hitchens writes, "But for some reason—conceivably connected to his status as an exile—he cannot allow that direct Western engagement in the region is legitimate."

Is the exile status of Said the most obvious explanation here? What about the West's history of "engagement" in the region—one especially fine example being the U.S.-British installation of the Shah after overthrowing the democratically elected government in Iran to get control over Iranian oil? And yet from where Hitchens sits, the Said fiction that is American Orientalism "doesn't seem that restless [that is, restless enough to want an oil pipeline in Afghanistan] ... it asks only that the Afghans leave it alone."

Oh, the poor wronged innocent that is the West! I find it hard to understand how Hitchens can give the West, especially its incarnation as the present Bush Administration, such a free pass, when he gave Clinton and even Mother Theresa no quarter. He uncovered or

constructed for us every conceivable deviousness of theirs. What went wrong, Mr. Hitchens, with your powers to make transparent?

Nina Sakun
Hartford, Conn.

When Christopher Hitchens asks what went wrong in Edward Said's failure to explain the East to the West, he seems to suggest that there is a valid alternative explanation to the obvious state of the Middle East (those mainly Arab and Muslim states around the Mediterranean), and that the West should have a hand in providing it. I'm afraid that if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, a duck it likely is. On all the evidence, even of its own institutions, intelligentsia, and media, the Middle East is primarily ignorant, cruel, unjust, and unproductive in the entirety of its civic, personal, and religious expression. For all his apparent residual, instinctual left-wing leaning to mythomania, Hitchens surely accepts that today's East is doomed to extinction. Is he too dangerously hopeful? Where in history has there ever been a recovery from the depths of failure in which the people of the Middle East find themselves today? Sadly but clearly they are falling under the weight of their own inadequacies, not ours, and the West should follow America's lead in not letting them drag us down with them.

Keith Hancock
Nanaimo, B.C.

Unfortunately, the anti-Israel and anti-American views of Edward Said have infected not only his students but also the university where he teaches. Christopher Hitchens correctly points out that Said could have been a bridge between the Arab world and Western civilization but instead has supplied a platform for dismissing Western values in favor of a radical form of pan-Arabism that threatens our relations with this region of the world.

His actions in attempting to stone Israeli soldiers protecting Israel's northern borders with Lebanon was only the tip of the iceberg in what has degenerated from anti-Israel actions to overt anti-Semitism. Certainly he has been a credit

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Nelson Marans

Silver Spring, Md.

I would like to commend Christopher Hitchens for his sensitive and insightful analysis of Edward Said's work. With regard to German colonialism, Hitchens is correct to point out Wilhelm II's visit to Damascus as an example of a German *Drang nach Osten*, but noting this has little relevance for Said's views of potentially Orientalist German literary production of the early nineteenth century, since both Goethe (1832) and Friedrich Schlegel (1829) died before there was an official German imperialist project (and, indeed, before there was an imperial Germany). Nevertheless, that Germans were eager to participate in colonial enterprises prior to the 1871 unification of Germany is ably documented by Susanne Zantop in her book *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany 1770-1870*. None of this, however, absolves Said of his misrepresentation of Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*—a work that Hitchens aptly characterizes as “one of the most meticulous and respectful considerations of the Orient we have”—as an Orientalist text. Whereas Said states that “the essence of Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority,” Goethe in the *Divan* repeatedly refuted this, such as when he wrote, echoing the Koran, “The Orient is God's! / The Occident is God's!,” thereby equating the two parts of the world.

Said's misunderstanding of *West-östlicher Divan* begins with its title, which he repeatedly gives in *Orientalism* as *Westöstlicher Diwan*, a mistake that Hitchens unfortunately reproduces in his review. The proper title is *West-östlicher Divan*, “Divan” being a transliteration of the word based on Persian phonetics, whereas “Diwan” follows the sound of the same word in Arabic. The greatest influence on the *Divan* was the poetry of the great Persian poet Hafiz, which Goethe had read in German translation and which inspired him to compose his own *Divan*.

More significant is Said's omission of the hyphen in *West-östlich*, a hyphenation chosen by Goethe himself. In eliminating the hyphen, Said negates the possibility of living between two worlds, something he himself has done quite successfully. As Goethe wrote in lines not included in the *Divan* but possibly meant for it:

*Also zwischen Ost- und Westen
Sich bewegen, sei zum Besten!*

(Therefore between East and West
To move oneself, that is the best!)

Without entering into a debate on the suitability of Iraqi exiles in the governance of postwar Iraq, I want to share in Hitchens's “hope of cultural and political cross-pollination between the ... Middle East ... and the citizens of the Occident.” Culturally, the finest example of that cross-pollination may be Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*. And just as the Eastern poet Hafiz inspired the Westerner Goethe, so, too, has the *Divan* inspired one of the Muslim world's greatest poets, Muhammad Iqbal, spiritual founder of the state of Pakistan, to compose his *Persian Message of the East: An Answer to Goethe's Divan*.

Kamaal Haque
St. Louis, Mo.

Christopher Hitchens replies:

I have a feeling that Laura Nader would have found my review “bizarre in its opacity” even if she did not write “as an anthropologist who teaches about the Middle East and Orientalism.” And I have spent enough time teaching in Berkeley to be familiar with people whose academic world view explains less and less about what actually confronts them.

I do not think, to begin with, that Professor Said would thank her for saying that he claims no role as interpreter or “negotiator.” There is an immense volume of work under his name that suggests the contrary. His most recent essay at the time I wrote, in Al Hayat (August 25, 2003), says, “As far as the Middle East is concerned, the discussion must include Arabs and Muslims and Israelis and Jews as equal participants. I urge everyone to join in and not leave the field of values, definitions, and cultures uncontested.” If only one side in this argument had anything to learn, Ms. Nader might conceivably hope for a chair in the study of the region.

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Her reverse-Orientalist dogma has no means of explaining the alliance of the Turkish empire with imperial Germany, any more than it can account for the current colonization by post-Ottoman Turkey of Christian and European Cyprus. Nor does she care to engage me when I point out the obvious—the demand by the supporters of Osama bin Laden (and significant others) that the old imperial caliphate be restored. When she states, then, that “the reverse has not been true,” are we to understand that she forgets the historic Muslim invasion and colonization of the Balkans, or of Spain or Greece, or the frantic nostalgia for same? Or may we suppose that this is news to her? In that case it must seem doubly odd that American military power recently prevented the extermination of the Muslims of Bosnia and Kosovo, who are themselves the descendants of that famous “interaction.”

The role of the United States in all this has been paradoxical and contradictory: it indulges Muslim Turkey in Cyprus, for example, just as it overindulges Messianic Jewish settlement in Palestine. Woodrow Wilson opposed the Anglo-French carve-up of the caliphate; Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy were friendly to the decolonization of North Africa; and Dwight Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles forced a defeat on the last European “punitive expedition” at Suez in 1956. (The most actively colonial of the current European powers, the France of Jacques Chirac, continues to intervene in Africa and the Middle East with great promiscuity while ranging itself solidly against regime change in Iraq.) Those who lack any ironic or dialectical ability may still wish to ask what Iran has done with its oil resources under the quarter-century rule of a stupid, aggressive, sterile theocracy that once dispatched state agents to murder an Indian novelist living on “Euro-American” soil.

I think that I can fairly claim to know that the United States government more than once demonstrated culpable laxity toward Saddam Hussein’s system—a system that was something more than merely “brutal.” But this point on Nader’s part is made only to be discarded in bad faith—because her real animus is obviously against those who argued successfully that such a policy was wrong and ought to be reversed. If, to her, the two positions are

equally “Orientalist,” then I think it’s plain that she has collapsed into tautology.

Nina Sakun obviously spared herself the reading of that part of my review which dealt with the Shah of Iran and the deserved ignominy of his fall. It would probably seem simplistic of me if I said that there was a considerable difference between an intervention to install a tyrant in Iran in 1953 and an intervention to remove one (and to prepare for an election) in Iraq in 2003. But that’s how simple-minded I am prepared to be. I feel comparatively sophisticated, nonetheless, when contrasted with those who think that the polity of the United States or the United Kingdom consists of an unchangeable and single personality, incapable of evolution over six decades. Even so, I do not regard “the West” as a “poor wronged innocent.” That’s a description I would reserve for the 3,000 or so people of all nationalities and cultures who were murdered on one working day by the envoys of international Islamic zealotry (and for the innumerable and presumably “Eastern” Afghans, Pakistanis, Algerians, and Iranians, among others, who have been murdered or enslaved or repressed by Talibanism and its emulators).

Keith Hancock and Nelson Marans seem to suffer from different but related forms of sectarianism—too narrow and particular for this large and complex argument. Mr. Hancock forgets that the failed-state diagnosis he cites has recently applied with equal force to Orthodox Christian Serbia and Catholic Croatia, both of them just as proximate to the Mediterranean. But there were democratic and pluralistic forces buried under that ruin and now gradually re-emergent, just as there are in Iraq and Kurdistan and Turkey and Egypt and Algeria. Our task is to keep faith with these very elements, and not to see them vulgarly denounced as “Western puppets.” This task is made infinitely more difficult by voices such as that of Nelson Marans, who seems to feel that dissent from his view of the Palestine question is sufficient warrant for dismissal from a tenured position at an American university. I might not have chosen Professor Said’s method of celebrating Israel’s overdue departure from its illegal occupation of Lebanese soil, but he had a perfect right to this contemptuous form of expression, and it did not affect in the least his responsibilities at Columbia, which he

has always discharged with exemplary scruple and measure.

I say this in spite of the fact that, in the Al Hayat essay cited above, Professor Said accuses me of "racism at bottom" for my review, and with heavy sarcasm asserts that I glory in Anglo-American imperialism and wish to punish the "wooly-haired natives." I'll refer those who may still harbor this view to my Atlantic review on the subject of colonial partition (March 2003). And I'll say again that I think Said's work has been undergoing a qualitative degeneration from what was once a very exalted standard.

One of the pleasures of writing for this magazine is the arrival of letters such as that from Kamaal Haque, whose expertise I should have drawn upon before daring to set pen to paper on this subject.

Advice & Consent

William Langewiesche's article "Anarchy at Sea" (September *Atlantic*) certainly rang my bells. During the 1980s I served as a technical adviser at the International Maritime Organization for the International Transportworkers Federation, a labor organization with "observer" status that addresses various seamen's issues including safety. It seeks to be the "conscience" of the IMO. Here is what I learned:

First, shipowners, through their various nations, are in control of the agenda and results. Since most of the world's shipping is represented by owners in comparatively rich and technologically advanced countries, they vote their interests. Flag-of-convenience countries never deviate from the shipowners' program. Voting power is apportioned on the basis of "tonnage"—that is, how much ship weight is under a flag. Thus Third World countries and those with little tonnage have little say in either the process or the outcome.

Second, the IMO's work is primarily driven by profit, for both shipowners and their respective nations' interests. For example, many new rules specify a technological solution to problems that many countries can ill afford. Satellite-communications units are mandated for safety, but only a few countries manufacture them. Countries with strug-

gling economies are hard pressed to raise their standards to meet rules and regulations demanding expensive technology. These countries can neither manufacture nor service the required equipment. For technologically advanced countries mandated equipment is an economic bonanza.

Third, the IMO reaches its conclusions through "consensus." It tends to take an idea or procedure that has the possibility of bearing fruit and whittle, modify, and expand the descriptive text until what was an apple appears to have become an over-ripe tomato. The product pleases everyone because it accomplishes nothing but appears to be progressive. It is a display case with no real merchandise.

Fourth, the IMO is a plum assignment, especially if you are from a disadvantaged country. It overlooks the Thames across from Big Ben, in London. Lunches are delicious and priced at about a third of their street value. Like other organizations in which what you see is inversely proportional to what is produced, the IMO is also a welfare program for its staff.

Finally, the IMO neither regulates nor enforces. Although lots of paper is generated, most of the work dealing with it falls on overworked ships' crews, which are constantly being reduced in size. The only thing that the ships' masters and the companies want to hear is "Your papers are in order." Enforcement of rules and regulations depends entirely on which nation-state is doing the enforcing. It is spotty, with few consequences for noncompliance. Likewise, inspections are a joke. It may be worth remembering that the CEO of Exxon's marine division retired shortly after the *Exxon Valdez* disaster to take the helm of the American Bureau of Shipping. The ABS is represented in ports around the world and certifies seaworthiness.

After twenty years as a seafarer, ten of them representing seafarers, it is difficult not to be cynical about maritime "regulation." Little will be done about ship safety, piracy, or opportunities for maritime terrorist activities in the foreseeable future.

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THE AGENDA

THIS MONTH, *Archbishop Akinola up close; Diana Mosley in memoriam; how marriage affects male productivity*

PHILIP JENKINS

"Even in the world of animals, dogs, cows, lions, we don't hear of such things," Archbishop Akinola, of Nigeria, has said of homosexuality. The powerful Akinola's views could help bring about global schism for the 75 million adherents of the Anglican Communion this fall.

PAGE 46

MARK STEYN

"Diana Mosley was the last person alive to know both Churchill and Hitler. The former was married to her second cousin, the latter came to her wedding reception."

PAGE 52

PRIMARY SOURCES

"Love gives you wings," goes the old saying, but new research suggests that—for professional men, at least—marriage has the effect of clipping them.

What causes male productivity to 'turn off' after marriage?"

PAGE 54

THE WORLD IN NUMBERS

"A country with a population equaling the number of those murdered by governments from 1900 to 1987 would today be the sixth largest on earth."

PAGE 56

ODIOUS RULERS, ODIOUS DEBTS

Should the people of Iraq be forced to pay back money borrowed by Saddam? A Nobel laureate makes an urgent case for forgiveness

BY JOSEPH STIGLITZ

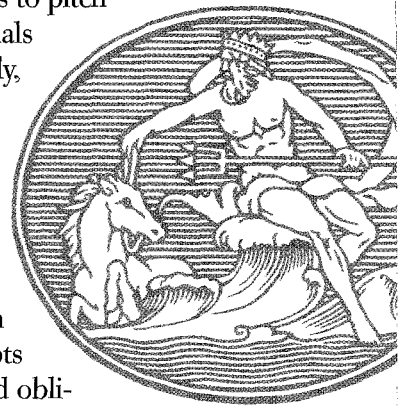
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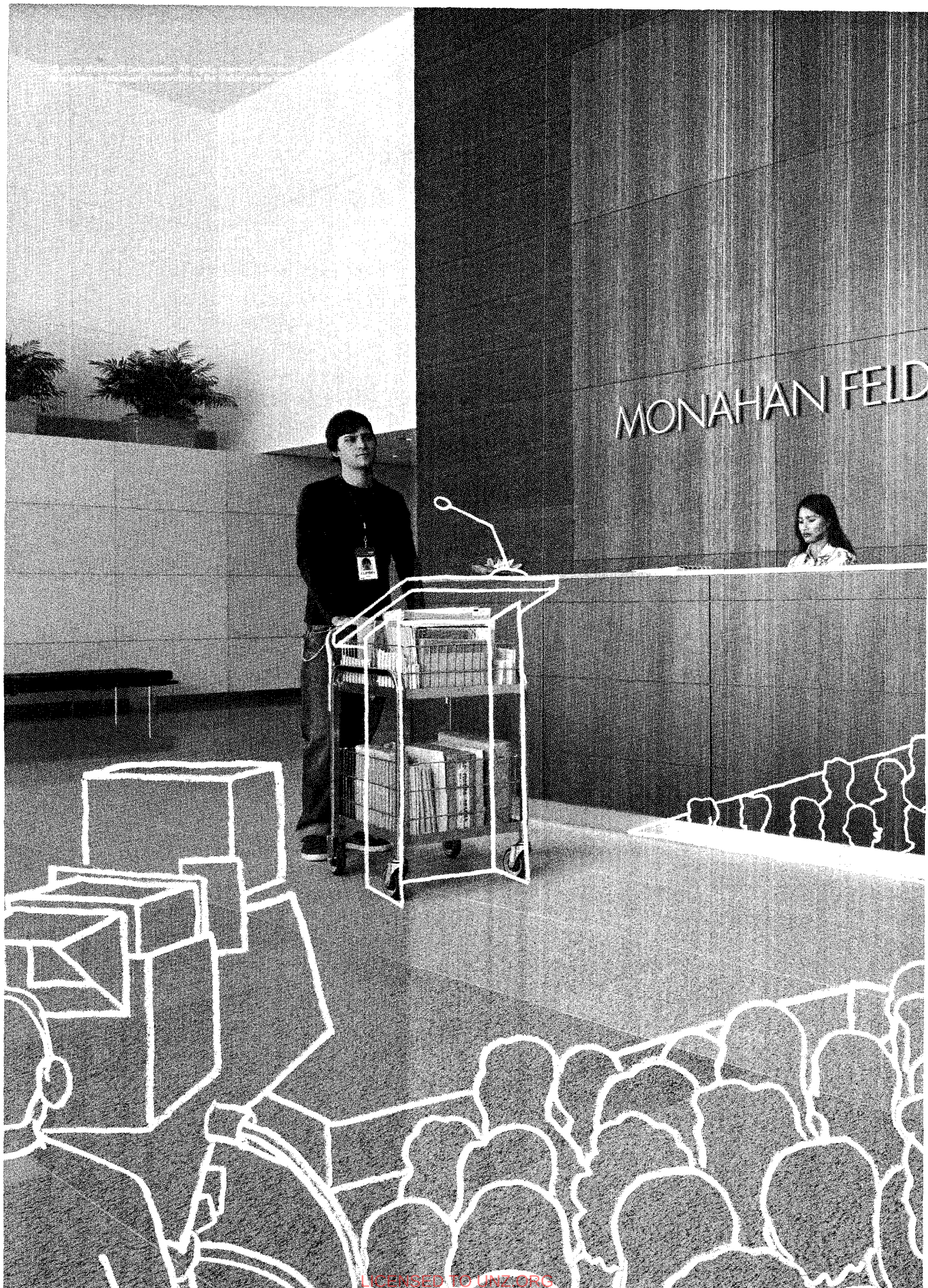
At the end of World War I, John Maynard Keynes, later to become the founder of modern macroeconomics, returned from the Versailles Treaty negotiations disappointed by the outcome and wrote a forceful little book, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. Its message was simple: the burden of reparations imposed on Germany would lead to economic crisis and social and political turmoil—and the result would not be good for Europe. Keynes turned out to be right.

Today, after a decade of isolation and a devastating war, Iraq faces the daunting task of reconstructing its economy while moving from a form of ersatz socialism to market capitalism. The United States waged war in Iraq without significant assistance from other countries, spending \$80 billion or so on ordnance, equipment, humanitarian aid, and troops, and has so far remained almost alone as it tries to make peace. Now, the Bush Administration argues, it is time for others to pitch in. The important thing at this point, U.S. officials suggest, is to get Iraq on its feet again economically, because then the country will be able to tap into its immense oil wealth, making further international assistance unnecessary.

The problem is that Iraq today is encumbered by huge debts—with estimates totaling anywhere from \$60 billion to the hundreds of billions, which includes reparations imposed on the country after the 1991 Gulf War, earlier debts incurred because of ammunition purchases, and obligations assumed under contracts signed during Saddam Hussein's regime. As Iraq's oil starts to flow again, much of the revenue it generates may go directly into the hands of international creditors, greatly impeding reconstruction efforts. Iraq needs a fresh start, and the only real way to give it one would be to free the country from what some call its "odious debts"—debts incurred by a regime without political legitimacy, from creditors who should have known better, with the monies often spent to oppress the very people who are then asked to repay the debts. Most of Iraq's current debt was incurred by a ruthless and corrupt government long recognized as such—although complicating the matter is the fact that the Iraqi regime appears to have received some support from the United States under Ronald Reagan.

Debt relief in Iraq will not be simple. Russia and France, for example,



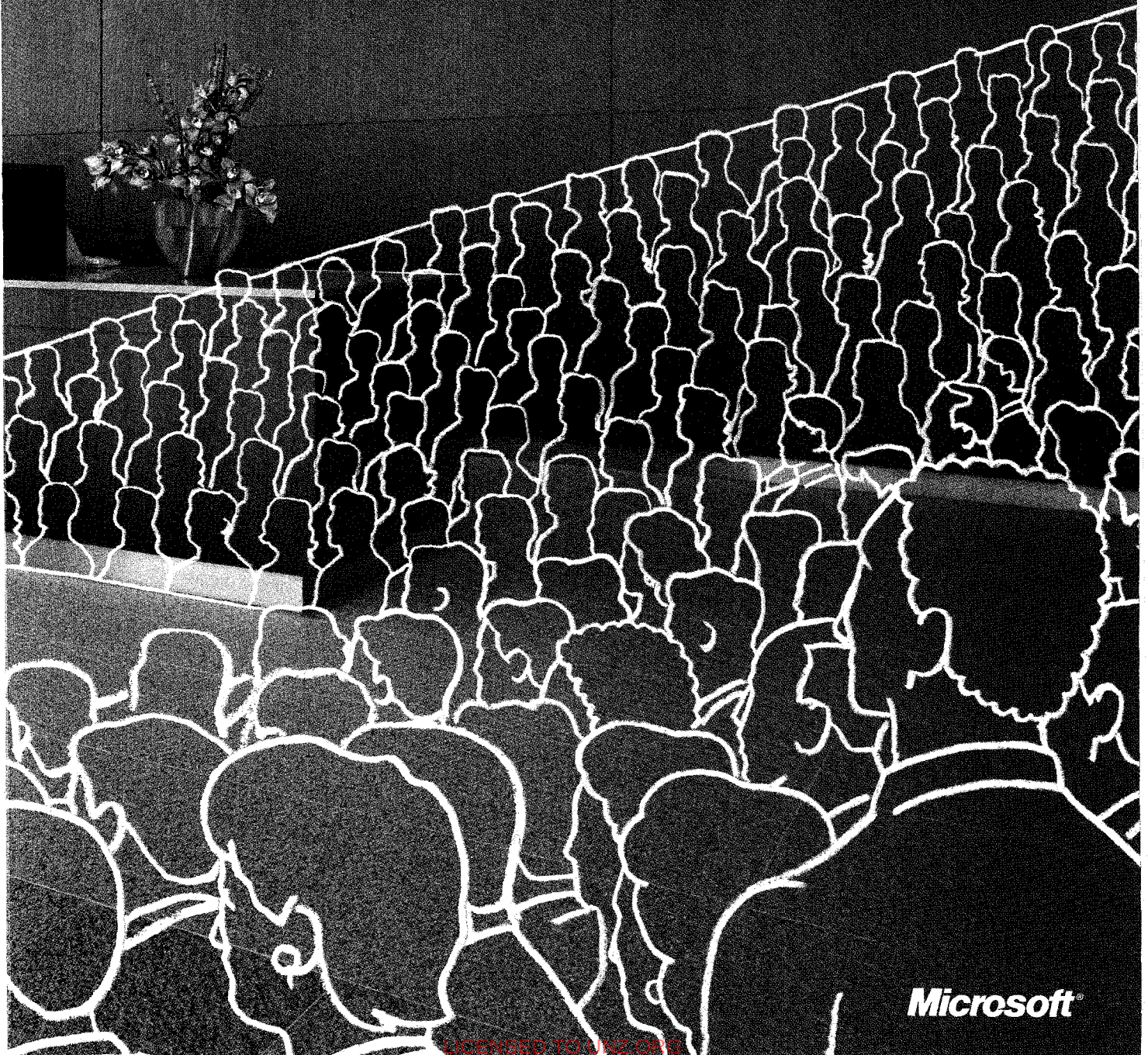


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are unlikely to be willing to forgo entirely the significant sums owed them in order to help rebuild an economy devastated by an invasion they opposed. Kuwait, too, is owed enormous sums, in reparation for the *first* Gulf War. International agreement on the need to invade Iraq proved impossible to come by, and there's no reason to think that agreement on the matter of debt relief will be any easier to achieve.

Of course, Iraq isn't the only country that would like to see its debts forgiven. Why should the Congolese be forced to repay Cold War loans made by Western countries to buy Mobutu's favor—especially since the lenders knew full well that the money was going not to the people of the country but to Mobutu's Swiss bank accounts? Why should Ethiopians have to repay the loans made to the Mengistu "Red Terror" regime—loans that made it possible to buy the arms used to kill the very people whose friends and relatives must now repay the loans? Chileans today are still paying off debts incurred during the Pinochet years, and South Africans are still paying off those incurred under apartheid. Argentines are still repaying the money that financed the "dirty war" in their country, from 1976 to 1983.

Regrettably, we have no rule of law at the international level for the restructuring of government debts. In the past,

Western governments had an easy way of dealing with countries that didn't meet their financial obligations: they invaded them. Today we live in what we hope is a more civilized world: we no longer openly condone armed attacks by one country on another for a failure to pay up. At the level of personal debt we've made progress, by instituting bankruptcy laws to replace debtors' prisons, portrayed so graphically in the work of Charles Dickens. And yet to date we have no parallel set of laws governing the restructuring and relief of international debt. Two years ago the International Monetary Fund at last recognized that this is a major problem and proposed a set of guiding principles. Achieving international consensus on these principles would have been difficult (the IMF was insisting, problematically, that it serve as the bankruptcy judge, or play some other central role in the bankruptcy process, despite the fact that it is one of the international community's major creditors), but the United States pronounced the initiative unnecessary, effectively blocking it altogether.

What we are left with is a set of ad hoc initiatives based informally, and to a disturbing degree, on the shifting interests of the United States, which on this issue has eschewed international cooperation to pursue a "having the cake and eating it too" strategy. We are perfectly willing to countenance debt forgiveness

when other countries are owed money, but if our own money is at stake we argue eloquently for the sanctity of contracts, regardless of the political circumstances. When the corrupt Suharto was overthrown, in 1998, America was adamant that Indonesia honor the contracts the U.S. government had encouraged the country to enter into. When India threatened to abrogate energy contracts with Enron (deals that forced that country to pay outrageous prices for electricity), top officials in the Bush Administration insisted that the contracts be honored. Contracts that are as disadvantageous to a country as the Enron contracts were to India naturally raise suspicions of corruption. Of course, we have a national law, the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act of 1977, that prohibits bribery by American firms working abroad, but this certainly doesn't mean that U.S. firms are never corrupt. In recent years other governments have adopted similar anti-corruption commitments, but we are rightly suspicious of those promises—as other countries are of ours.

We need an international "bankruptcy" court, with no vested national interest, to deal with debt restructuring and relief, and to ensure a fair sharing of the burdens this would create. The United Nations could devise a set of principles—a rule of law—that would guide the court as it assessed the validity of contracts made with, and debts incurred by, outlaw regimes. Loans to build schools might be permitted, and the debt obligation, accordingly, would not be treated as odious; loans to buy arms might not be permitted. In some cases the court might decide that a loan for an ostensibly good purpose ran a high risk of being used for nefarious objectives—in which case the loan would be disallowed. Governments and banks that lend money to oppressive regimes would be put on notice that they risk not getting repaid, and the contracts and debts of countries with outlaw regimes would be re-examined once those regimes were no longer in power.

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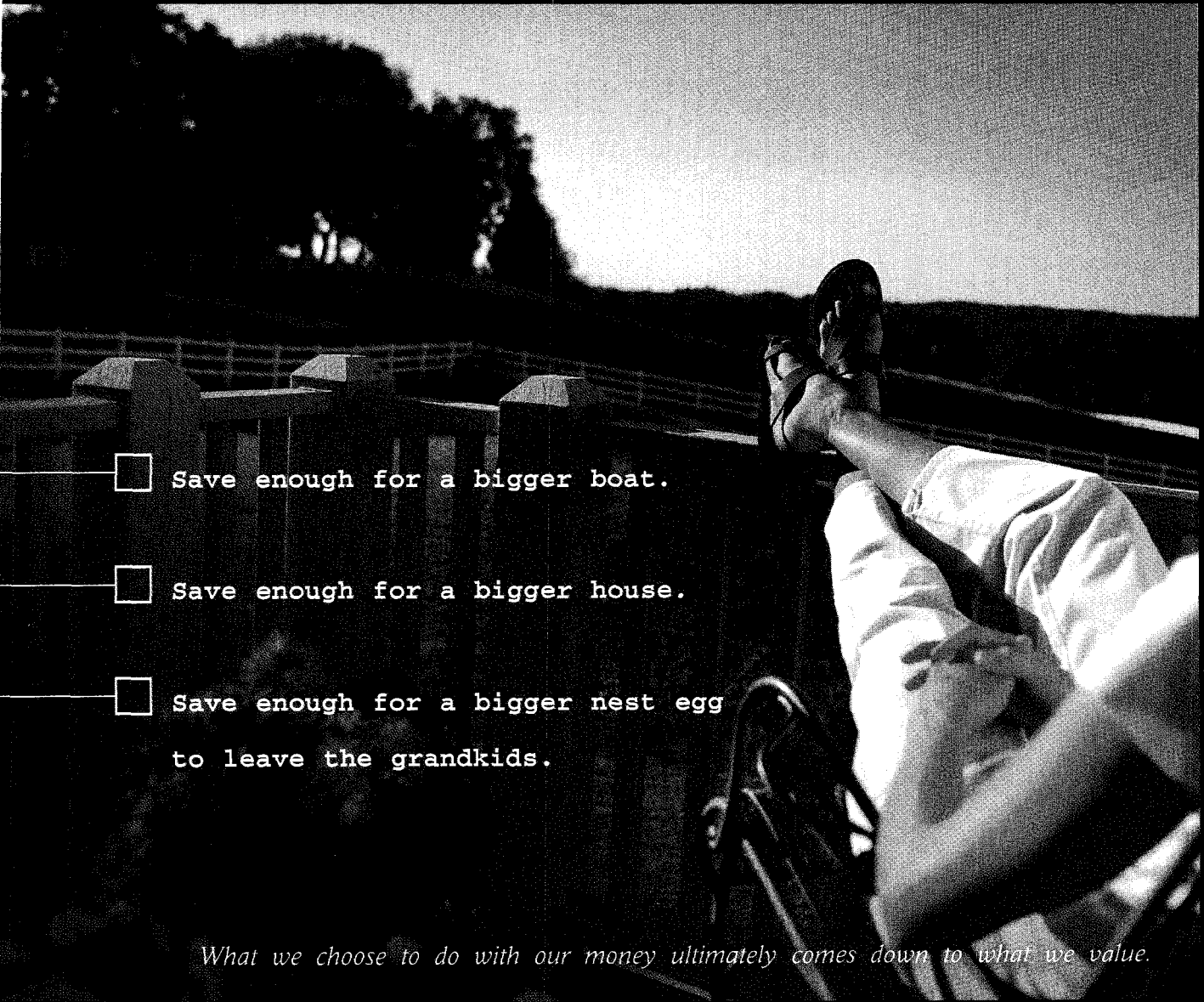


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Even when creditors and borrowers are honest, even when creditors practice due diligence (lending only if the prospect of repayment is reasonable), unexpected developments can make repayment extremely difficult, if not impossible. Prices of exports can plummet, prices of imports can soar, and interest rates can rise—a situation faced by many Latin American countries in the early 1980s and again in 1998. Although we take great pride in the sophistication of modern financial markets (which use derivatives to manage risks, and which in principle shift burdens from those less able to bear them to those more able), the sad fact is that less developed countries have been left to bear the brunt of interest- and exchange-rate fluctuations. We must now recognize that debt forgiveness and debt restructuring make as much sense for governments—benefiting debtors and creditors alike—as they do for companies and individuals. Absolutely nobody gained from the overhang of debt in Latin America in the 1980s, a decade during which growth in the region stalled and poverty increased enormously. Creditors certainly didn't get their money back, and it was only with the implementation of the long-delayed Brady plan of debt restructuring, set in motion by U.S. Treasury Secretary Nicholas F. Brady in 1989, that growth resumed.

The bankruptcy of a state differs from private bankruptcy in several important ways, of course. Creditors can seize assets from a private debtor, but this is typically not possible in the case of government debts. Many courts may vie for jurisdiction; few can enforce judgment. Government debts tend to involve many "public claimants" in addition to formal creditors—including, for instance, those who are owed retirement benefits or are demanding health or education services. In fact, U.S. bankruptcy law has a special chapter on public entities, dealing with not only the existence but also the primacy of public claimants.

As for the current, urgent case of Iraq, the public claims of the Iraqi people for debt restructuring and relief must take precedence over the debt obligations that now saddle the country. Foreign creditors—France, Russia, Kuwait—are nevertheless likely to attempt to enforce their claims, quite possibly by trying to seize the proceeds from the sale of Iraqi oil. Whether in the long run such claims would be sustained is only one thing at issue; the real worry is that they might well interfere with the marketing of Iraqi oil, and thus with the privatization of the Iraqi oil companies. Indeed, fearing the legal battles that may be in store, international oil companies have already expressed a reluctance to come into Iraq—a good example of the price the United States and the international community will pay for not having developed a legal framework to handle such claims.

The United States is slowly learning the costs of unilateralism. Countries such as India and Turkey are refusing to help maintain the peace in Iraq outside a UN framework. Globalization requires more cooperative action among the countries of the world—but such action *has* to be based on democratic principles and a rule of law. If the United States expects the international community to work cooperatively on the reconstruction of Iraq's economy, and to cut Iraq the slack it needs on its debts, then America must commit itself to something in return: the establishment of a framework for addressing debt relief, debt restructuring, and odious debts—a framework that includes an international court that can develop and enforce a set of widely agreed-upon principles. Only with those principles in place will decisions seem fair. And without them the prospects for winning the peace in Iraq will further diminish. ▀

Joseph Stiglitz, a former chief economist of the World Bank, a former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, and a member of the Cabinet under President Bill Clinton, received the 2001 Nobel Prize in Economics. He is a professor of economics and finance at Columbia University.

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DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

Why all Anglican eyes in London are nervously fixed on a powerful African archbishop

The most important figure today in the Anglican Communion, a worldwide federation of churches with some 75 million adherents, is probably a man few people in the West know anything about: Archbishop Peter Jasper Akinola, of Nigeria. An uncompromising traditionalist, Akinola presides over the most vibrant and almost certainly the largest Anglican community in the world—at a time when the Anglican world's true center of gravity has shifted to Africa.

It was no small matter, then, when Akinola went public this past summer with blistering denunciations of proposals to consecrate openly gay bishops and to sanctify gay marriage. Commenting on the decision of the Canadian diocese of New Westminster to approve the blessing of gay unions, Akinola declared that the diocese had in practice seceded from the Anglican world. Reacting to a proposal in the Church of England to ordain a gay bishop (a proposal ultimately withdrawn after intense pressure from African and Asian leaders), Akinola thundered, "This is an attack on the Church of God—a Satanic attack on God's Church." And during the buildup to the U.S. Episcopal Church's controversial ordination of Gene Robinson as the bishop of New Hampshire, he announced, "I cannot think of how a man in his senses would be having a sexual relationship with another man. Even in the world of animals, dogs, cows, lions, we don't hear of such things."

American and European readers may be inclined to dismiss such remarks as coming from a hidebound bigot, or perhaps from a demagogue seeking attention—but they would be wrong to do so. In his attitudes toward sexuality, and above all in his attitude toward religious authority, Akinola represents a deep-rooted conservative tradition in African Christianity that is flourishing and growing, and that is simply not going to vanish as levels of economic growth and education rise in Africa. The prospect of imminent global schism in the

Anglican Communion is therefore real.

Matters may well have come to a head by the time this article goes to press: in October the Archbishop of Canterbury was scheduled to preside over an emergency session in London of the primates of his Church worldwide. Perhaps the session will turn out to avert open schism, but even the friendliest such meeting could not change the nature of the enduring conflict between the older and the younger Anglican churches, with those of Europe and North

America set against those of Africa and Asia. Methodists, Lutherans, and Presbyterians are watching these events with foreboding, because what is really at issue, of course, is competing conceptions of the nature of religious authority, of the relationship between the religious and secular spheres, and even of the possibility of coexisting peacefully with other faiths.

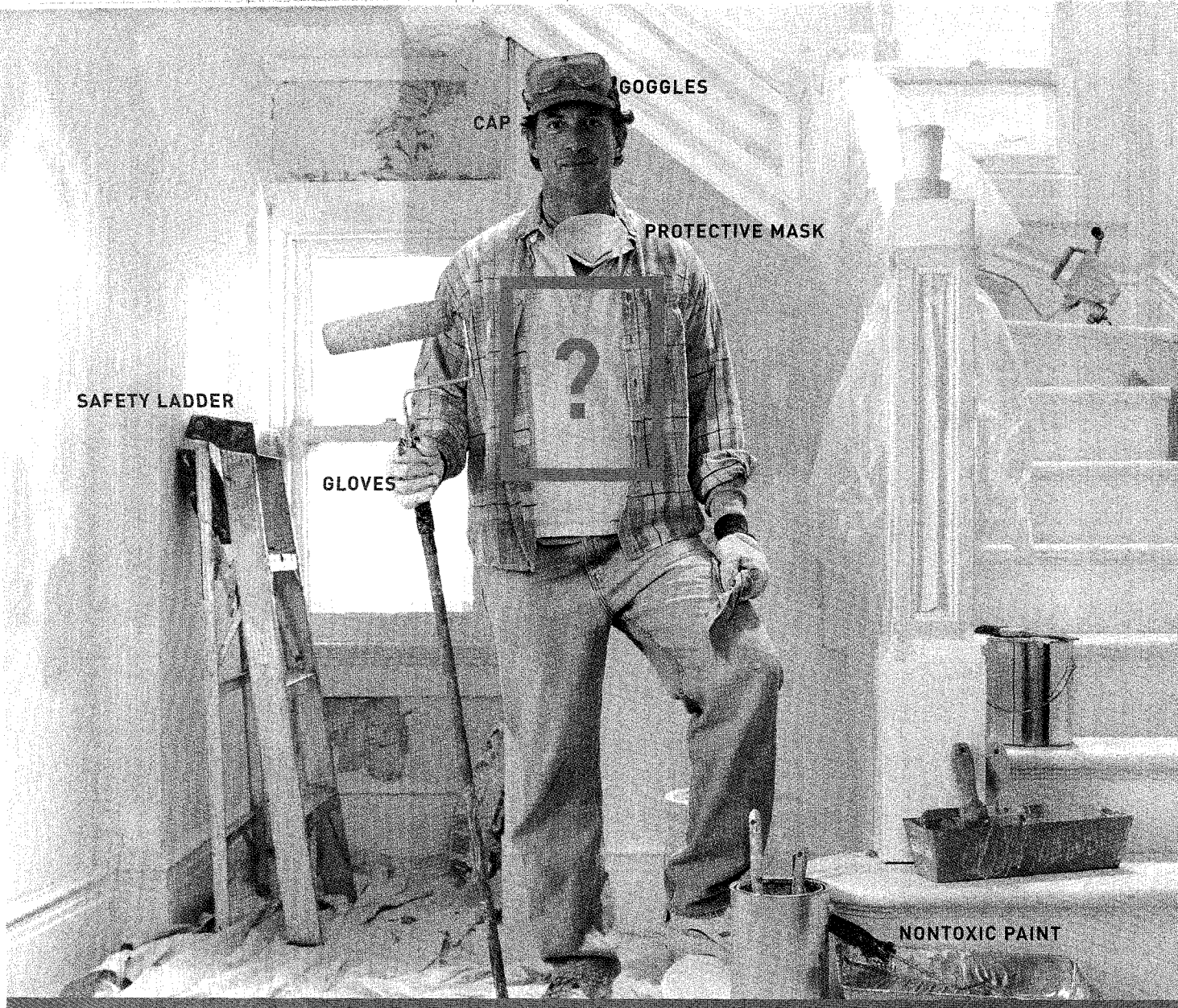
Peter Jasper Akinola is (not necessarily in this order) a Nigerian, a Christian, and an Anglican. He is an imposing figure, tall and graying, who has been married for thirty-four years and has six children. He was born in 1944 and spent his early life in the province of Ogun, the land of the Yoruba people, in the far west of Nigeria; he was sixteen when the country achieved its independence. Akinola thus came of age in an era of enormous optimism about a nation that had the potential, because of its vast oil reserves and its surging population, to be one of the most powerful countries in Africa—indeed, possibly a world power. From 1966 to 1970, however, Nigeria was torn apart by a civil war that killed perhaps two million people, and from 1983 to 1999 the country was ruled by a series of brutal and stunningly corrupt military dictatorships that set back development at home and blighted the nation's reputation overseas. In this disastrous secular environment many Nigerians began to see their future in the Christian churches, which offered a growing place of refuge.

When Nigeria's civil war began, Akinola was starting an entrepreneurial career in Lagos as a carpenter and a furniture maker, with a sideline in patent medicines. In 1968 he began training as a catechist, and after studying at Anglican theological colleges in northern Nigeria, he was ordained a deacon in 1978 and a priest in 1979. He traveled to the United States and in 1981 received a master's in theology at Virginia Theological Seminary. Later that year he returned to Nigeria, to Abuja, the city that was being developed as the nation's new federal capital. His return coincided with the start of a remarkable religious explosion. The Nigerian Church has never since known anything but boom years, and the specific nature of this boom is central to understanding Akinola's response to the debates over homosexuality.

The Anglican Church of Nigeria was founded by British missionaries in 1842. For well over a century it grew healthily but not remarkably. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, the Church began a furious period of evangelism, with growth statistics that sound like the goals of a Stalinist Five Year Plan. In the late 1970s Nigeria was home to five million or so Anglicans; that number has now grown to perhaps 18 million, and it may double by 2025 or so. (To put that in perspective, North America has about four million Anglicans, and the number is stagnant or shrinking.) In 1979 the Nigerian Church had sixteen dioceses, organized in a single province; today it has nearly eighty dioceses, organized in ten provinces. In 1979 Nigeria had a single archbishop; today it has ten, overseeing a whole national hierarchy.

When Akinola arrived in Abuja, he began a mission from next to nothing, with "not even one square inch of land," as he told the magazine *Anglican World* in 2001. "There was no church member, no organ, no choir, no money, nothing—and I mean practically nothing." Eight years later he was the first bishop of the see of Abuja; by 1998 he was the arch-

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**PHILIP
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ZOCOR is a prescription drug that is indicated as an addition to diet for many patients with high cholesterol. For patients at high risk of coronary heart disease (CHD) because of existing heart disease, diabetes, vascular disease, or history of stroke, ZOCOR is indicated along with diet to reduce the risk of death by reducing coronary death; reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke; and reduce the need for revascularization procedures.

WHEN ZOCOR SHOULD NOT BE USED

Some people should not take ZOCOR. Discuss this with your doctor.

ZOCOR should not be used by patients who are allergic to any of its ingredients. In addition to the active ingredient simvastatin, each tablet contains the following inactive ingredients: cellulose, lactose, magnesium stearate, iron oxides, talc, titanium dioxide, and starch. Butylated hydroxyanisole is added as a preservative.

Patients with liver problems: ZOCOR should not be used by patients with active liver disease or repeated blood test results indicating possible liver problems. (See WARNINGS.)

Women who are or may become pregnant: Pregnant women should not take ZOCOR because it may harm the fetus. **Women of childbearing age should not take ZOCOR unless it is highly unlikely that they will become pregnant.** If a woman does become pregnant while on ZOCOR, she should stop taking the drug and talk to her doctor at once.

Women who are breast-feeding should not take ZOCOR.

WARNINGS

Muscle: Tell your doctor right away if you experience any unexplained muscle pain, tenderness, or weakness at any time during treatment with ZOCOR so your doctor can decide if ZOCOR should be stopped. Some patients may have muscle pain or weakness while taking ZOCOR. Rarely, this can include muscle breakdown resulting in kidney damage. The risk of muscle breakdown is greater in patients taking certain other drugs along with ZOCOR:

- Cyclosporine, itraconazole, ketoconazole, erythromycin, clarithromycin, HIV protease inhibitors, the antidepressant nefazodone, or large quantities of grapefruit juice (>1 quart daily), particularly with higher doses of ZOCOR.
- Gemfibrozil, other fibrates, or lipid-lowering doses (≥ 1 g/day) of niacin, particularly with higher doses of ZOCOR.
- Amiodarone or verapamil with higher doses of ZOCOR.

The risk of muscle breakdown is greater at higher doses of simvastatin.

Because the risk of muscle side effects is greater when ZOCOR is used with the products listed above, the combined use of these products should be avoided unless your doctor determines the benefits are likely to outweigh the increased risks.

If your doctor determines that the benefits of combined use of ZOCOR with gemfibrozil, other fibrates, or niacin likely outweigh the increased risk of muscle problems, the dose of ZOCOR should not exceed 10 mg daily. No more than 10 mg/day of ZOCOR should be taken with cyclosporine.

The combined use of verapamil or amiodarone with doses above ZOCOR 20 mg should be avoided unless your doctor determines the benefits outweigh the increased risk of muscle breakdown.

Your doctor should also carefully monitor for any muscle pain, tenderness, or weakness, particularly during the initial months of therapy and if the dose of either drug is increased. Your doctor also may monitor the level of certain muscle enzymes in your body, but there is no assurance that such monitoring will prevent the occurrence of severe muscle disease.

The risk of muscle breakdown is greater in patients with kidney problems or diabetes.

If you have conditions that can increase your risk of muscle breakdown, which in turn can cause kidney damage, your doctor should temporarily withhold or stop ZOCOR. Also, since there are no known adverse consequences of briefly stopping therapy with ZOCOR, treatment should be stopped a few days before elective major surgery and when any major acute medical or surgical condition occurs. Discuss this with your doctor, who can explain these conditions to you.

Liver: About 1% of patients who took ZOCOR in clinical trials developed elevated levels of some liver enzymes. Patients who had these increases usually had no symptoms. Elevated liver enzymes usually returned to normal levels when therapy with ZOCOR was stopped.

In the ZOCOR Survival Study, the number of patients with more than 1 liver enzyme level elevation to greater than 3 times the normal upper limit was no different between the ZOCOR and placebo groups. Only 8 patients on ZOCOR and 5 on placebo discontinued therapy due to elevated liver enzyme levels. Patients were started on 20 mg of ZOCOR, and one third had their dose raised to 40 mg.

Your doctor should perform routine blood tests to check these enzymes before you start treatment with ZOCOR and thereafter when clinically indicated. Patients titrated to the 80-mg dose should receive an additional test at 3 months and periodically thereafter (eg, semiannually) for the first year of treatment. If your enzyme levels increase, your doctor should order more frequent tests. If your liver enzyme levels remain unusually high, your doctor should discontinue your medication.

Tell your doctor about any liver disease you may have had in the past and about how much alcohol you consume. ZOCOR should be used with caution in patients who consume large amounts of alcohol.

PRECAUTIONS

Drug Interactions: Because of possible serious drug interactions, it is important to tell your doctor what other drugs you are taking, including those obtained without a prescription. You should also tell other doctors who are prescribing a new medicine for you that you are taking ZOCOR. ZOCOR can interact with the following:

- Itraconazole
- Ketoconazole

- Erythromycin
- Clarithromycin
- HIV protease inhibitors
- Nefazodone
- Cyclosporine
- Large quantities of grapefruit juice (>1 quart daily)

The risk of myopathy is also increased by the following lipid-lowering drugs that can cause myopathy when given alone:

- Gemfibrozil
- Other fibrates
- Niacin (nicotinic acid) (≥ 1 g/day)

The risk of muscle breakdown is increased with other drugs:

- Amiodarone
- Verapamil

Some patients taking lipid-lowering agents similar to ZOCOR® (simvastatin) and coumarin anticoagulants (a type of blood thinner) have experienced bleeding and/or increased blood clotting time. Patients taking these medicines should have their blood tested before starting therapy with ZOCOR and should continue to be monitored.

Central Nervous System Toxicity; Cancer, Mutations, Impairment of Fertility: Like most prescription drugs, ZOCOR was required to be tested on animals before it was marketed for human use. Often these tests were designed to achieve higher drug concentrations than humans achieve at recommended dosing. In some tests, the animals had damage to the nerves in the central nervous system. In studies of mice with high doses of ZOCOR, the likelihood of certain types of cancerous tumors increased. No evidence of mutations or of damage to genetic material has been seen. In 1 study with ZOCOR, there was decreased fertility in male rats.

Pregnancy: Pregnant women should not take ZOCOR because it may harm the fetus.

Safety in pregnancy has not been established. In studies with lipid-lowering agents similar to ZOCOR, there have been rare reports of birth defects of the skeleton and digestive system. Therefore, women of childbearing age should not take ZOCOR unless it is highly unlikely they will become pregnant. If a woman does become pregnant while taking ZOCOR, she should stop taking the drug and talk to her doctor at once. The active ingredient of ZOCOR did not cause birth defects in rats at 3 times the human dose or in rabbits at 3 times the human dose.

Nursing Mothers: Drugs taken by nursing mothers may be present in their breast milk. Because of the potential for serious adverse reactions in nursing infants, a woman taking ZOCOR should not breast-feed. (See WHEN ZOCOR SHOULD NOT BE USED.)

Pediatric Use: ZOCOR is not recommended for children or patients under 10 years of age.

Geriatric Use: Higher blood levels of active drug were seen in elderly patients (70–78 years of age) compared with younger patients (18–30 years of age) in 1 study. In other studies, the cholesterol-lowering effects of ZOCOR were at least as great in elderly patients as in younger patients, and there were no overall differences in safety between elderly and younger patients over the 20–80 mg/day dosage range. Of the 7 cases of myopathy/rhabdomyolysis among 10,269 patients on ZOCOR in another study, 4 were aged 65 or more (at baseline), 1 of whom was over 75.

SIDE EFFECTS

Most patients tolerate treatment with ZOCOR well; however, like all prescription drugs, ZOCOR can cause side effects, and some of them can be serious. Side effects that do occur are usually mild and short-lived. Only your doctor can weigh the risks versus the benefits of any prescription drug. In clinical studies with ZOCOR, less than 1.5% of patients dropped out of the studies because of side effects. In 2 large, 5-year studies, patients taking ZOCOR experienced similar side effects to those patients taking placebo (sugar pills). Some of the side effects that have been reported with ZOCOR or related drugs are listed below. This list is not complete. Be sure to ask your doctor about side effects before taking ZOCOR and to discuss any side effects that occur.

Digestive System: Constipation, diarrhea, upset stomach, gas, heartburn, stomach pain/cramps, anorexia, loss of appetite, nausea, inflammation of the pancreas, hepatitis, jaundice, fatty changes in the liver, and, rarely, severe liver damage and failure, cirrhosis, and liver cancer.

Muscle, Skeletal: Muscle cramps, aches, pain, and weakness; joint pain; muscle breakdown.

Nervous System: Dizziness, headache, insomnia, tingling, memory loss, damage to nerves causing weakness and/or loss of sensation and/or abnormal sensations, anxiety, depression, tremor, loss of balance, psychic disturbances.

Skin: Rash, itching, hair loss, dryness, nodules, discoloration.

Eye/Senses: Blurred vision, altered taste sensation, progression of cataracts, eye muscle weakness.

Hypersensitivity (Allergic) Reactions: On rare occasions, a wide variety of symptoms have been reported to occur either alone or together in groups (referred to as a syndrome) that appeared to be based on allergic-type reactions, which may rarely be fatal. These have included 1 or more of the following: a severe generalized reaction that may include shortness of breath, wheezing, digestive symptoms, and low blood pressure and even shock; an allergic reaction with swelling of the face, lips, tongue, and/or throat with difficulty swallowing or breathing; symptoms mimicking lupus (a disorder in which a person's immune system may attack parts of his or her own body); severe muscle and blood vessel inflammation, sometimes including rash; bruises; various disorders of blood cells (that could result in anemia, infection, or blood clotting problems) or abnormal blood tests; inflamed or painful joints; hives; fatigue and weakness; sensitivity to sunlight; fever, chills; flushing; difficulty breathing; and severe skin disorders that vary from rash to a serious burn-like shedding of skin all over the body, including mucous membranes such as the lining of the mouth.

Other: Loss of sexual desire, breast enlargement, impotence.

Laboratory Tests: Liver function test abnormalities including elevated alkaline phosphatase and bilirubin; thyroid function abnormalities.

NOTE: This summary provides important information about ZOCOR. If you would like more information, ask your doctor or pharmacist to let you read the prescribing information and then discuss it with them.



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bishop of a province of Abuja, with eight bishops under him. Since 2000 he has been the primate of the whole Nigerian Church. The expansion that fueled his rise is the kind of growth that he sees as normal and that he expects will continue. "In our country today," he told *Anglican World*, "there are many new churches springing up on a daily basis." It was a claim he meant literally.

But in Akinola's view, this growth depends entirely on loyalty to orthodox biblical faith. His experience in Nigeria has shown him that orthodox churches flourish, and heretical or schismatic churches fail. Nigerian Anglicanism is at its core intensely Bible-centered. "We in Nigeria believe very strongly in the priority of the Scripture," he has said. "We want to see ourselves as a church that seeks to live in obedience to the dictates of the Scripture, regardless of whether that is convenient or inconvenient."

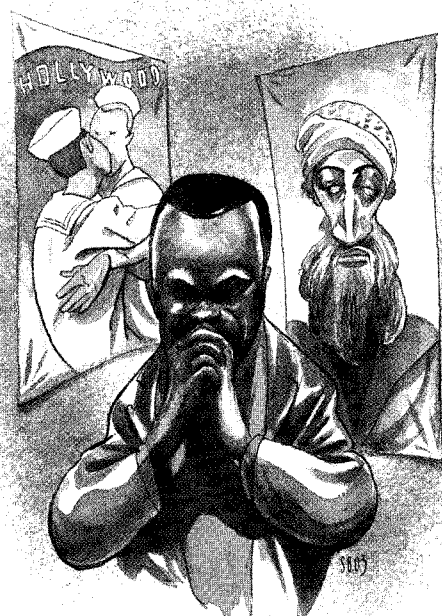
Akinola and his church are also firmly committed to evangelism. "If a fire is not burning," he has observed, "then it is no longer fire. If the Church is not evangelizing, then it is like a dead fire." Evangelism means spreading the message of the Bible, of course, and although debate about biblical interpretation is possible in some cases, Akinola sees no room for it when the New Testament text speaks as clearly as it does on homosexuality. The worst feature of the North American debates, he felt, was that scriptural arguments were simply ignored. Reacting to the Episcopal approval of Robinson's election, Akinola declared himself "astonished that such a high-level convention ... should conspire to turn their back on the clear teaching of the Bible on the matter of human sexuality."

Although Akinola believes that American and British churches are in error, his Anglican roots condition how and when he feels he can intervene directly. This tradition gives him a strong sense of the global dimensions of Christianity. He heads not the Church of Nigeria but the "Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)," and that is a crucial differ-

ence. Anglicans everywhere fall within his area of concern. His communion is a family, and as he has put it, "That is where we belong." Yet Akinola is reluctant to speak out of turn. He venerates the Anglican idea of autonomous churches under their own primates and bishops, and feels that a primate has no right to interfere in another province, except in the direst circumstances. He has been remarkably moderate toward the North American churches—however difficult this may be to believe for those who know him only from his recent remarks. In interviews he has gone out of his way not to condemn the U.S. Episcopal Church, and he makes a point of praising Bishop Frank Griswold, its leader, and other American liberals. He refuses to ally himself with American conservatives who want to break away from their liberal bishops altogether. "You don't just jump from your diocese to begin to do whatever you like in another man's diocese," he told the *Church of Nigeria News* in 2001. "That is not done in our Anglican tradition."

That Akinola has now spoken out so strongly on issues being debated in other countries suggests his level of fury. This arises in part from his sense that the Northern churches are abandoning the Christian moral tradition. But another element further explains Akinola's—and, indeed, African Christianity's—desperate intervention in the Church's controversies over homosexuality: rivalry with Islam. At first sight the connection may seem tenuous: what does it matter to Christians in Lagos or Kampala whether an Anglican minister blesses two men in a civil ceremony of union in Vancouver? But the link is in fact an important one.

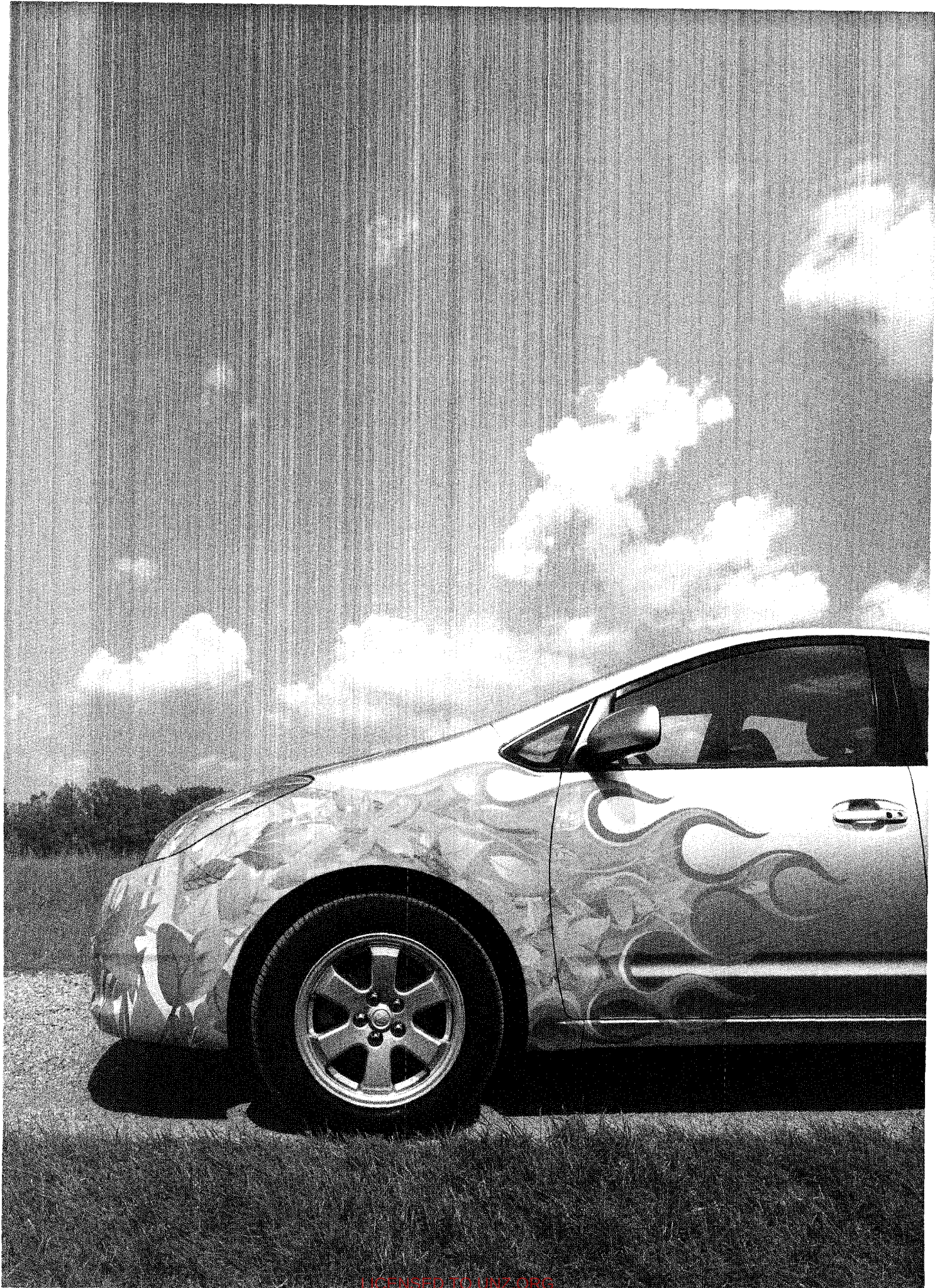
Nigeria is a land of intense interfaith conflict. Islamist authorities have imposed *sharia* law in a third of the country's thirty-six states, and Christians there face a very real danger of persecution and *jihad*. These *sharia* states include Kebbi and Kaduna, where Akinola lived during his years of theological training



in the 1970s. He saw firsthand the growth of Muslim militancy, and his diploma is from the Theological College of Northern Nigeria, located in Jos, which for several years now has been a storm center of rioting and anti-Christian pogroms. Since 1990 the Anglican Church has responded to these threats by deliberately reinforcing its presence in the Muslim north, to show that Christians are not going to fade away without a fight.

This struggle provides the crucial context for African concerns about sexual morality. Across the continent Muslims have tried to make converts by arguing that the Christian West is decadent and sexually irresponsible—a belief that finds daily confirmation in Western films and television. If the Anglican Communion accepted gay bishops or approved gay unions, Muslims would gain an enormous propaganda victory in Nigeria—and in a dozen or so other African countries in which Christians and Muslims compete for converts, often violently. When Akinola speaks out, therefore, it is not because he wants to intrude on the affairs of other churches but, rather, because he feels that the very existence of Christianity in his own territory is under threat. At stake, he believes, is the religious map of much of Africa, and the global balance between Christianity and Islam. ▀

Philip Jenkins is a Distinguished Professor of History and Religious Studies at Pennsylvania State University. His most recent book is The New Anti-Catholicism (2003).



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TODAY TOMORROW

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BRIGHT YOUNG THING WITH A BLIND SPOT

Diana Mosley (1910–2003)

Diana Mosley was the last person alive to know both Churchill and Hitler. The former was married to her second cousin, the latter came to her wedding reception. She was born into that section of English society that takes it for granted one will be related to a fair proportion of eminent men. But, as if to underline the not always acknowledged fluidity of the British aristocracy, she expanded her social circle well beyond traditional confines. Her wedding planner was Goebbels.

She was one of the six famous Mitford sisters. There have been books, plays, TV dramas, and a musical about the Mitford girls—or “gels”—and two thirds of the sisters have been good enough writers to burnish the legend through any quiet patches. With the exception of Diana, with her pale cheeks and huge china-blue eyes, they weren't really beauties. Nor were they rich: their father, Lord Redesdale, was a broken-down rural peer well off the beaten track of high society. But they were “Hons.” That's not an abbreviation for “honeys” but for “Honourables,” as in the courtesy title given to the daughters of barons and viscounts. Plotting their escape from dreary provincialism, the Hon. Diana and her sisters determined to marry well.

It didn't exactly work out as planned: Nancy had a terrible, debilitating lifelong love for Colonel Gaston Palewski, aide to General de Gaulle and the randiest man in France, which is saying something; Jessica eloped with Winston Churchill's Communist nephew, and later settled down in America with her fellow leftie Bob Treuhaft; Unity had a pash on Hitler and shot herself at the outbreak of war. Only Debo and Pam made conventional upper-class marriages, one to a duke, the other to a bisexual. Diana ended up with Sir Oswald Mosley, leader of Britain's Fascist party, and wound up spending most of the Second World War in jail. In the twenties there were lots of silly giggly girls dashing about Mayfair—“bright young things,” as Evelyn

Waugh called them in the novel he dedicated to Diana—but only the Mitfords transformed themselves into a collective of distaff Forrest Gumps, always somewhere in the picture at the decisive moments of twentieth-century history. Even on the West Coast, Jessica and Bob Treuhaft's employees included at one point a young Hillary Clinton.

POST
MORTEM
**MARK
STEYN**

Diana was my favorite, and hilarious company. Even when she was talking about something ineffably sad, she couldn't steer clear of the jokes for long. Discussing her only brother, Tom, killed in the war, fighting for king and country against the Japanese allies of her old friend and wedding guest Herr Hitler, she soon turned to happier memories: One weekend as children they'd been motoring with Lord and Lady Redesdale through the Oxfordshire countryside. At school, Tom had a crush on a boy called Milton. As they passed the sign for the village of Milton-under-Wychwood, he sighed, “Lucky Wychwood.”

It was when the jokes stopped that one got uneasy. If you're going to have one blind spot, being soft on Hitler and married to his bargain-basement British branch office is not the one to have. I got to know her in her seventies, and as the spidery sign-offs at the end of her letters advanced chummily from “Diana Mosley” to “Diana M.” to “Diana,” I began to feel a little queasy. “Are you a Jew?” she asked me. “You're *so* clever.” Usually she meant the Jews were clever in always keeping “the thing”—the Holocaust, as she could never quite bring herself to say—in the public eye, unlike the millions killed in the name of the ideology her sister Jessica supported. This is a fair point, and true to this day, when the elites of the Western world still brim with shills for genocidal leftists. But it's not a point the public is willing to take from a pal of the Führer's.

Her husband was a Labour MP who went on to found the British Union of Fascists. Socialism does not always lead to National Socialism, but in the early thirties statism of one degree or another was all the rage in Europe: communism, fascism, Nazism. Even in Britain, liberal democracy was thought by all the great thinkers to be inadequate as an organizing basis for society. Of course, if you weren't a great thinker, the notion that Sir Oswald and his excitable continental comrades were the chaps to put in charge was utterly risible. In *The Code of the Woosters*, P. G. Wodehouse turned Mosley into Roderick Spode, founder of the Saviours of Britain, a movement modeled on Hitler's Brownshirts and Mussolini's Blackshirts and hampered only slightly by the fact that all the good shirt colors had been taken and they were obliged to go around as the Black Shorts.

“Footer bags, you mean?” gasps a horrified Bertie Wooster.

But Bertie has the measure of the would-be dictator. “The trouble with you,

Spode, is that just because you have succeeded in inducing a handful of half-wits to disfigure the London scene by going about in black shorts, you think you're someone. You hear them shouting, ‘Heil, Spode!’ and you imagine it is the Voice of the People. That is where you make your bloomer.

What the Voice of the People is saying is, ‘Look at that frightful ass Spode swanking about in footer bags! Did you ever in your puff see such a perfect perisher?’”

There, in a nutshell, is the history of British fascism. In the late seventies Mosley still expected the people to realize their error and belatedly turn to him. “I am ready to serve,” he'd say, gravely, as interviewers tried to keep a straight face. He and Diana spent decades in exile in Paris in a grand house in miniature absurdly called le Temple de la Gloire—the Temple of



Glory—or, as her more malicious friends dubbed it, the Concentration of Camp. It's a heartless joke, characteristic of the English toff. But it's the jokes that explain the difference between Britain and the Continent: unlike their European counterparts, the English elite could never take fascism seriously enough to fall for it.

I had the misfortune to meet some of the Mosleys' shriveled band of followers. Bitter little Cockneys, to whom all Jews were "Yids" and all blacks were "wogs." But, in a sense, their awfulness confirmed Diana's certainties about her husband. The people were too crude and stupid: they needed great men to tell them what to do. That was also why, for the last half of her long life, she was a passionate supporter of the European Union—the latest of the elite's grand plans for the people after the failures of all the others. "Everything is so much more efficient in France than in England," Diana told me. "The government understands that to govern is to decide. And if you do that, the people will follow."

Diana loved Paris—so well-ordered, so un-American. But the city, its windows un-disfigured by those ghastly American air-conditioners, was a little too stifling, and a day after complaining about the heat she had a stroke. Thousands upon thousands of others died, because the hospitals were understaffed and the government was at the beach. Next time it happens, new Kyoto-compliant regulations will ensure that most air-conditioners remain beyond the reach of the masses.

I wouldn't have expected Diana to be among the many elderly victims of France's insouciant bureaucracy, but it's a cruel joke that she would have been the first to see. The elite, unlike the masses, can usually escape the consequences of big ideas. This summer European Big Government finally caught up with her. ▀

Mark Steyn is a columnist for Britain's Telegraph Group, the Chicago Sun-Times, and other publications.

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George Bush's new report card for government agencies; the odds of terrorist attack in the coming year; why marriage and high achievement don't mix—for men

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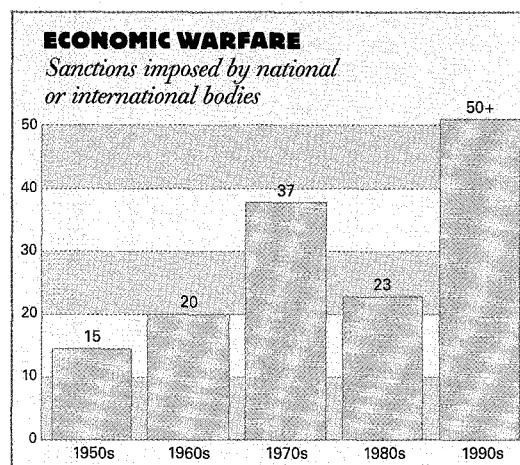
It's the Motivation, Stupid

The risk of another terrorist attack in the United States before next summer is "high," according to a recent study by the UK-based World Markets Research Centre; indeed, only three countries in the world—Colombia, Israel, and Pakistan—are at greater risk. The researchers, who ranked the risks of terrorist attacks in the coming year in 186 countries worldwide, based their conclusions on an analysis of five criteria: motivation ("the extent to which domestic or transnational groups are currently motivated to mount attacks in or against the country"); presence ("the extent to which the country suffers from a sustained terrorist threat, either from domestic or transnational sources"); scale ("the ability and desire of the terrorists to cause significant casualties and damage"); efficacy ("the known sophistication, capability and effectiveness of terrorist groups operating in that country"); and prevention ("the proven intelligence and counterterrorism capabilities of the country's security services"). The good news is that when it comes to preventing attacks, the United States is near the top of the list, tied with Israel and close behind Spain and the United Kingdom—all countries that have long experience combating significant terrorist threats. The bad news is that the study ranks prevention (along with efficacy) as the least important of the five criteria, making up only 10 percent of a country's overall risk assessment. The study's authors consider motivation to be by far the most important criterion (40 percent), which suggests that terrorists—particularly those targeting a large, free country like the United States—will inevitably find ways to inflict attacks, despite even the best counterterrorism efforts. Those seeking maximum safety from terrorist attacks may want to consider North Korea, which ranks at the very bottom of the list: the

The (Limited) Power of the Purse

Whether the invasion of Iraq really signals a newfound American enthusiasm for pre-emptive military adventures is at this point an open question. But much better established, and in no way attributable to Paul Wolfowitz, is America's tendency to throw its considerable economic weight around. From 1970 to 1998 economic sanctions were imposed 117 times by national or international bodies—and the United States was a sanctioning party in two thirds of those cases. Sanctions were much more popular in the latter half of the twentieth century than previously; according to a study published recently in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, they were imposed only fifteen times in the 1950s but more than fifty times in the 1990s. The trend is somewhat puzzling, given that sanctions have never been terribly effective; indeed, an earlier report cited by the study's authors indicates that only about 33 percent of the time have they achieved even a portion of the desired result. What's more, sanctions have become less effective over time. The authors contend that rising unilateralism, combined with globalization, is one reason: with more potential trading partners and financiers available worldwide, it has been harder and harder for a single country—even the United States—to inflict substantial harm on another state by withholding goods, finances, or market access.

—"Sanctions: Neither War nor Peace," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*



grim efficiency of the country's internal security apparatus makes it difficult for terrorists to operate there—and it's hard to imagine that many international groups would want to anyway.

—"Global Terrorism Index 2003/4,"
World Markets Research Centre

THE NATION

Just Say Fewer

"Most students at [insert college name here] have five or fewer drinks when they party." In recent years tag lines like this have been carried, on passels of flyers and posters, into the dorms and common spaces of many U.S. college campuses. Part of an emerging trend called "social-norms marketing" they aim to reduce student drinking by turning

nonconfrontational peer pressure to good ends. It is, of course, debatable whether most students pay any attention, especially through the haze of five vodka tonics—and according to researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health, they don't. In a five-year study of more than 100 colleges, social-norms marketing campaigns were found to be completely uncorrelated with any decrease in alcohol consumption. But the study suggests they may have had one nasty little side effect: *increasing* alcohol consumption among two groups of light-to-moderate drinkers. It may be that these students are increasing their alcohol consumption toward "acceptable" levels.

—"Perception and Reality: A National Evaluation of Social Norms Marketing Interventions to Reduce College Students' Heavy Alcohol Use," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*

The Competitive Advantage of George Clooney

"Love gives you wings," goes the old saying, but new research suggests that—for professional men, at least—marriage has the effect of clipping them. A study published recently in the *Journal of Research in Personality* examines the work lives of scientists, painters, jazz musicians, authors, and criminals, and the radical (and somewhat controversial) conclusion is that married men in each of these categories typically achieve their greatest professional successes relatively young, before or shortly after getting married, whereas unmarried men in the same categories continue to achieve at very high levels well into their fifties and sixties. Among the 280 prominent scien-

tists whose lives were studied (almost all of whom were men), 17 percent of the unmarried ones made their greatest contributions in their late fifties; the figure for married scientists of the same age was just 4.2 percent. What causes male productivity to "turn off" after marriage? The study hypothesizes that chemicals are ultimately to blame—in particular testosterone, which falls after marriage (and rises again in the case of divorce). The study concerns itself mostly with men, but the author notes briefly that the few women studied do not exhibit a similar hormonally driven achievement curve; they tend to achieve steadily throughout their lives.

—"Why Productivity Fades With Age: The Crime-Genius Connection," *Journal of Research in Personality*

BUSINESS

Enron Everywhere

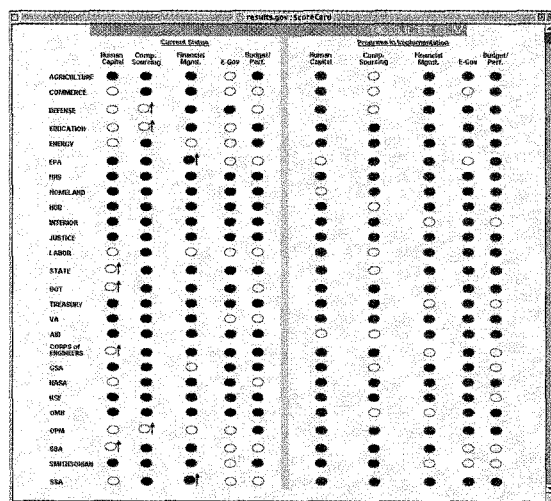
Survey the American people and they'll tell you that despite the recent wave of corporate scandals, U.S. businesses remain paragons of virtue. A poll underwritten by the watchdog group Transparency International recently gave people the opportunity to wave a "magic wand" and free any institution from corruption's grip; fewer than five percent of the American respondents chose business, with larger numbers choosing the education system (8.6 percent), medical services (10.1 percent), and political parties (39.1 percent). Just seven percent believed that business corruption is a "very significant" problem overall. Ask business executives themselves, though, and you'll hear a different story. Thirty-five percent of American executives recently surveyed by PricewaterhouseCoopers and the law firm Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering said that their own companies had been the victims of "significant economic crimes" within the past two years. The executives judged "asset misappropriation" and "cybercrime" to be the most common of those crimes, accounting for 25 percent and eight percent of all economic criminal activity during the same two-year period. They were strikingly inconsistent in their perceptions of "financial misrepresentation" (the crime that fueled last year's media firestorm); they believed up to half of all U.S. companies were guilty of it, but only two percent of them reported any such wrongdoing in their own back yards. And when it came to predicting the future, they were deeply pessimistic: 84 percent of those surveyed believed that the risk of fraud five years from now would be as bad as or worse than it is today.

—"TI Global Corruption Barometer," Transparency International; "Economic Crime Survey 2003," PricewaterhouseCoopers and Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering

Bush Sees Red

What does George W. Bush, the first U.S. President with an M.B.A., really think of the federal government's management performance? The latest "Executive Branch Management Scorecard"—released by the White House this summer, at www.results.gov, and pictured here—offers some idea. On the scorecard various agencies and departments receive quarterly grades (red for failure, green for success, and yellow for something in between) on both their current results and their progress in five broad areas selected by the Bush Administration, including human capital, financial management, and budget performance. As can be seen from the left side of the card, the past quarter's results show that the overwhelming majority of agencies and departments are deemed to be failing in most areas. Indeed, eighty-seven of the 130 grades in the "current status" portion of the scorecard are red. (And these failures can be extreme. According to the evaluation criteria, an agency might be graded red in financial management if "its books are such a mess that auditors cannot express an opinion on the agency's financial statements.") The right side of the card, admittedly, paints a brighter picture: the preponderance of green dots here indicates that many agencies are making progress. Still, it's not encouraging that eight of the twenty-six departments and agencies graded, among them the Justice, Homeland Security, and Treasury Departments, are failing in all five areas.

—Results.gov: Resources for the President's Team



For links to the reports and documents discussed in these pages visit www.theatlantic.com/issues/2003/11/primarysources.htm

MURDER BY THE STATE

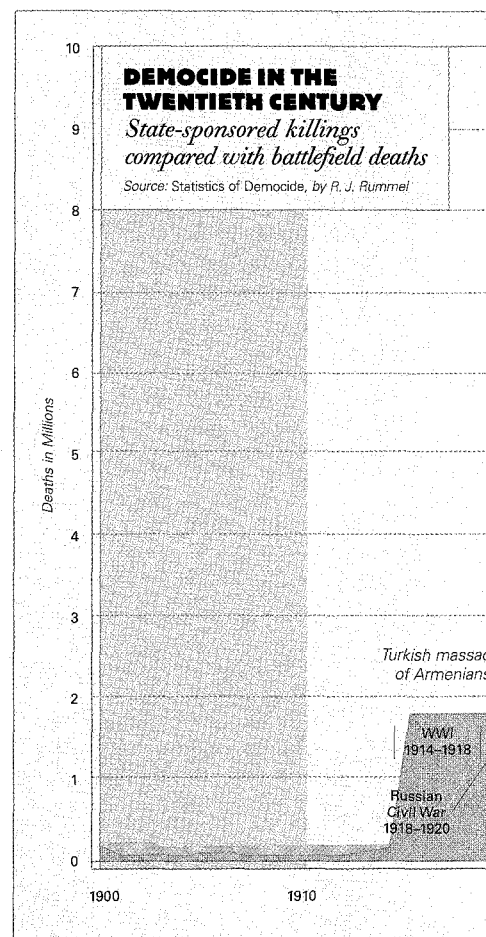
Far more people were murdered by governments in the twentieth century than died in all the century's wars combined

From the time that Saddam Hussein formally took control of the Iraqi state, in 1979, until his removal, earlier this year, perhaps 290,000 people went missing in Iraq, according to an estimate made recently by Human Rights Watch. Most are presumed dead, the victims of state-sponsored killing sprees aimed at eliminating challenges to Saddam's rule. The map below—based on information gathered recently at more than twenty mass gravesites by investigators from Human Rights Watch and Physicians for Human Rights—documents only some of the killings but is nevertheless the best representation to date of the scale, the geographic spread, and the chronology of the Iraqi state's murders.

By anyone's estimation, Saddam Hussein killed his own people prodigiously. But in the context of the almost continual state-sponsored killing that took place around the world during the twentieth century, his atrocities barely register. R. J. Rummel, a professor emeritus of political science at the

University of Hawaii, has painstakingly compiled statistics accounting for the number of people killed worldwide by "democide," a term he coined to describe governments' intentional killing—whether by induced famine, forced labor, assassinations, extrajudicial executions, massacres, or full-scale genocide—of civilians or military noncombatants. Although the actual number of people killed by democide is virtually unknowable, Rummel's books on the subject—particularly *Death by Government* (1994) and *Statistics of Democide* (1997)—provide the most comprehensive estimates currently available, and the ones most often referenced by scholars.

Rummel estimates that from 1900 to 1987 governments murdered almost 170 million people—a figure that far exceeds the 34.4 million battle deaths thought to have resulted from all the international and civil wars fought during the same period. To put this in some perspective: a country with a population equaling the number of those murdered by governments from



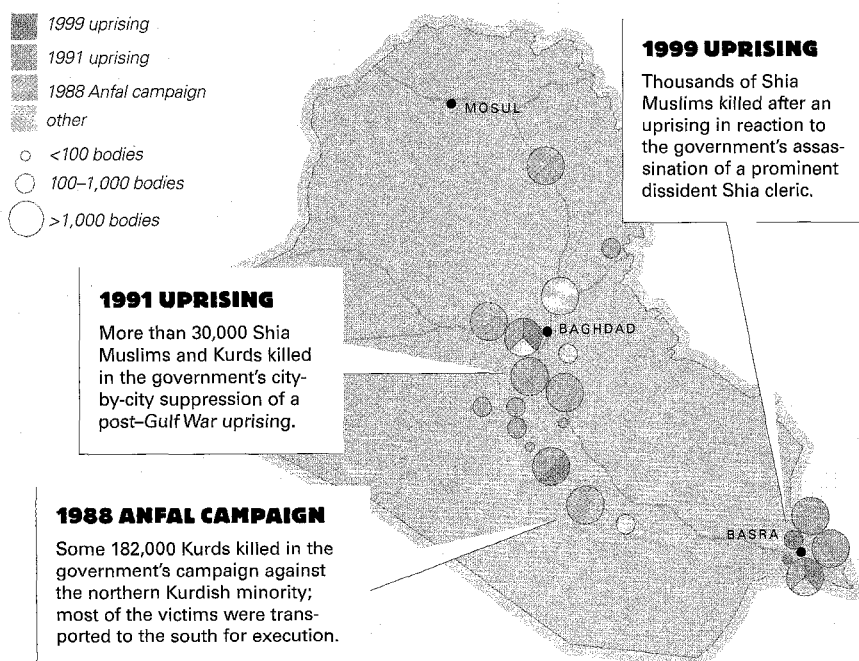
1900 to 1987 would today be the sixth largest on earth.

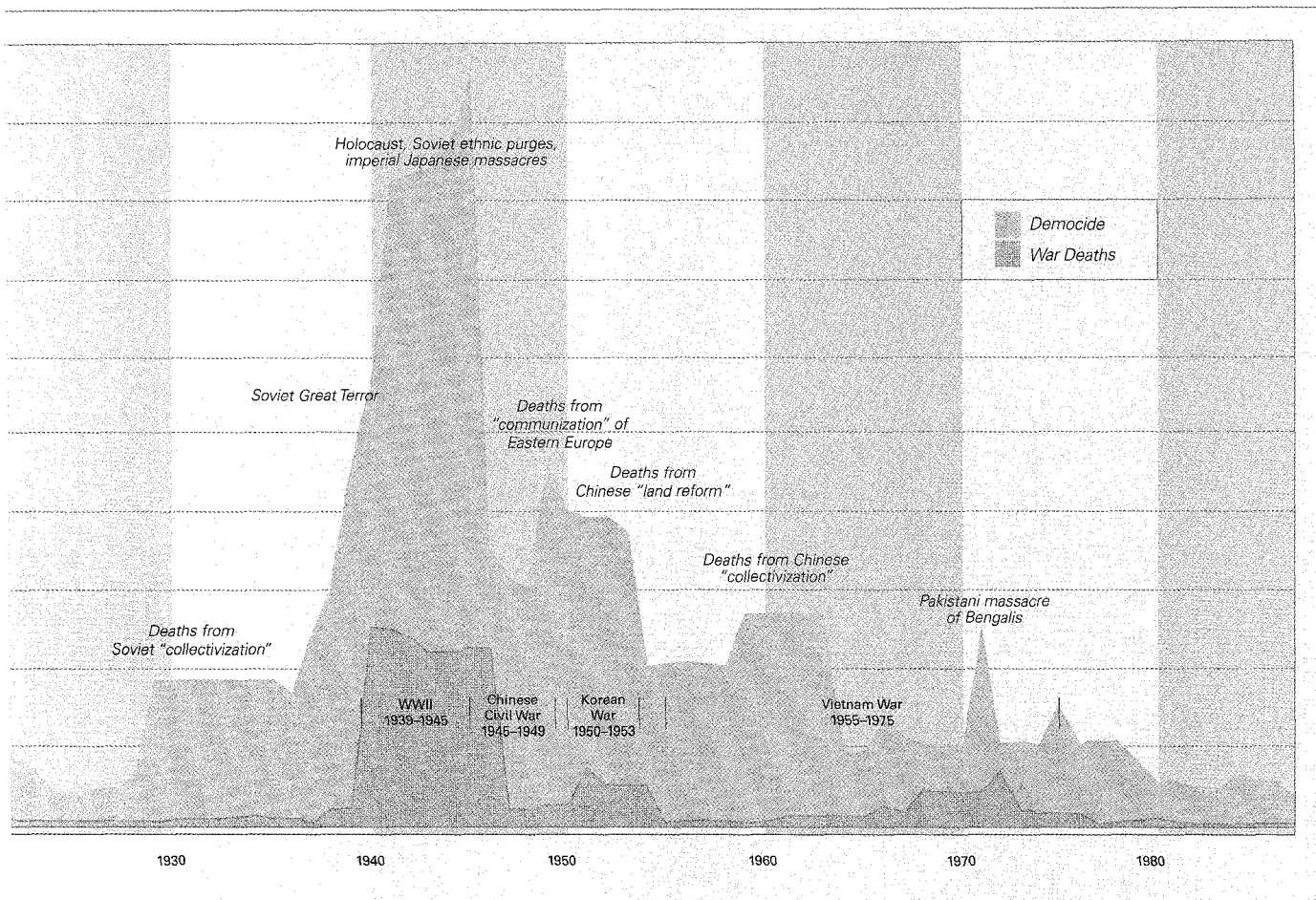
Democide is not a new phenomenon, of course, but scholars agree that state-sponsored killing accelerated greatly in the twentieth century. The reasons for this are varied, and include advances in technology, communications, and transportation, all of which enhanced and streamlined the logistics of mass killing. Perhaps most important, however, was the rise of the modern bureaucratic state. Centralized bureaucracies simplified the task of identifying and tracking target groups and provided an institutional cloak behind which executioners could hide.

The most egregious form of state-sponsored murder—genocide—has historically occurred for the practical reasons of empire: to eliminate threats or to acquire wealth and territory. Until the twentieth century, victims of genocide were usually selected on the basis of *where* they were, but in the past century victims were more often selected on the basis of *who* they were. Much of this

MASS MURDER IN IRAQ: AN EMERGING GEOGRAPHY

Mass gravesites identified by Human Rights Watch and Physicians for Human Rights





change can be linked to the rise of authoritarian political orders such as communism and fascism, which attempted to violently remold society according to their ideological or racial blueprints.

Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, of course, committed the vast majority of state-sponsored murders in the twentieth century, killing (by Rummel's estimate) more than 100 million people. But when it comes to leaders who have killed large proportions of their own populations, no one approaches the almost unimaginable toll exacted on Cambodia by Pol Pot, who murdered about a third of his country's people in only four years. Hitler killed about six percent of the population of Nazi-occupied Europe, and Saddam Hussein killed about one percent of Iraq's population.

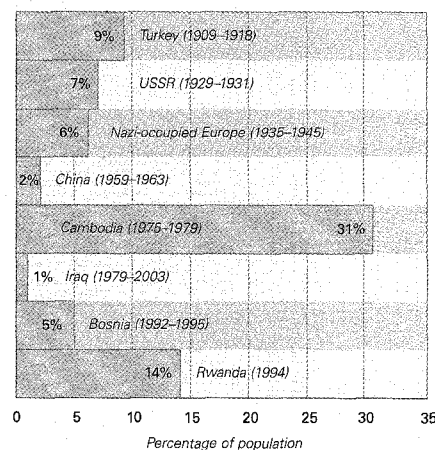
Democide most often occurs under authoritarian regimes during or in the immediate aftermath of wars. (Indeed, democratic governments were responsible for only about one percent of the twentieth century's total death toll from

democide.) In a 1998 study commissioned by the CIA, Barbara Harff, a professor of political science at the U.S. Naval Academy, developed a statistical model that helped identify the conditions underlying twentieth-century genocides. When she applied this model to the twenty-five countries that experienced armed conflict in 2001, Harff reached the conclusion that nearly half of them—Afghanistan, Algeria, Burma, Burundi, Congo-Kinshasa, Ethiopia, Iraq, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Uganda—displayed political, economic, and social conditions putting them at high risk of genocide in the coming years. These conditions include economic isolation, the political dominance of a minority elite, and, not surprisingly, a history of previous genocides. (Some scholars have suggested that Harff's model underestimates the relevance of per capita income, which they claim is the best predictor of the ethnic insurgencies and civil wars that underlie her analysis.)

Improving the plight of conflict-

LETHAL PROPORTIONS

Percentages of entire populations killed by democide



ridden and failed states has become a strategic priority for industrialized nations, which increasingly see these states as potential breeding grounds for international terrorism. But, as Harff's analysis suggests, an even greater concern should be their potential to usher in fresh rounds of state-sponsored killing. —BRUCE FALCONER

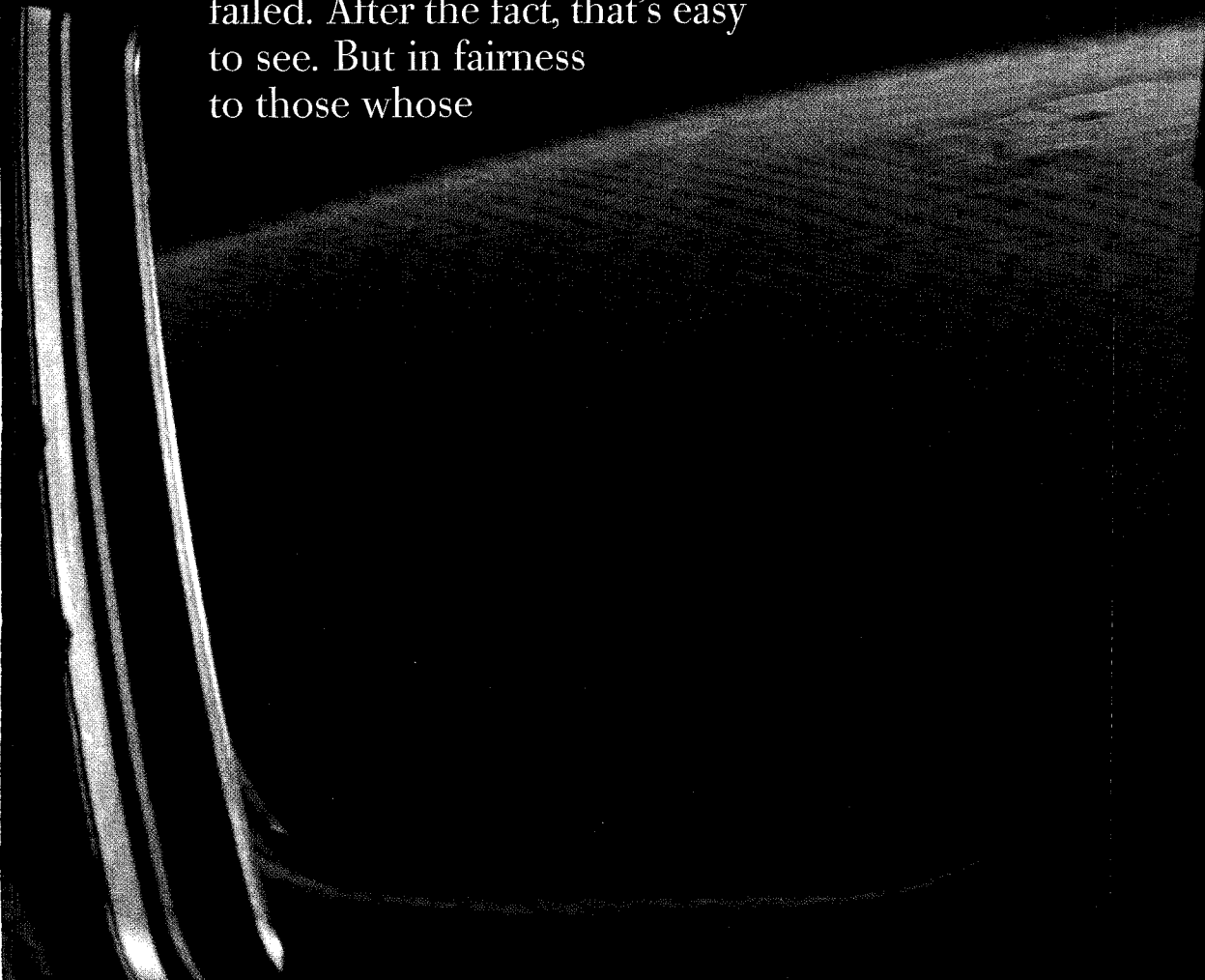
COLUMBIA'S LAST FLIGHT

*The inside story of the investigation—
and the catastrophe it laid bare*

BY WILLIAM LANGEWIESCHE

.....

Space flight is known to be a risky business, but during the minutes before dawn last February 1, as the doomed shuttle *Columbia* began to descend into the upper atmosphere over the Pacific Ocean, only a handful of people—a few engineers deep inside of NASA—worried that the vehicle and its seven souls might actually come to grief. It was the responsibility of NASA's managers to hear those suspicions, and from top to bottom they failed. After the fact, that's easy to see. But in fairness to those whose





*Sunrise
photographed
by a crew member
aboard the shuttle Columbia
on Flight Day 7 of the final mission*

reputations have now been sacrificed, seventeen years and eighty-nine shuttle flights had passed since the *Challenger* explosion, and within the agency a new generation had risen that was smart, perhaps, but also unwise—confined by NASA's walls and routines, and vulnerable to the self-satisfaction that inevitably had set in.

Moreover, this mission was a yawn—a low-priority “science” flight forced onto NASA by Congress and postponed for two years because of a more pressing schedule of construction deliveries to the International Space Station. The truth is, it had finally been launched as much to clear the books as to add to human knowledge, and it had gone nowhere except into low Earth orbit, around the globe every ninety minutes for sixteen days, carrying the first Israeli astronaut, and performing a string of experiments, many of which, like the shuttle program itself, seemed to suffer from something of a make-work character—the examination of dust in the Middle East (by the Israeli, of course); the ever popular ozone study; experiments designed by schoolchildren in six countries to observe the effect of weightlessness on spiders, silkworms, and other creatures; an exercise in “astroculture” involving the extraction of essential oils from rose and rice flowers, which was said to hold promise for new perfumes; and so forth. No doubt

eras and had arrayed themselves on hills or away from city lights to record the spectacle of what promised to be a beautiful display. The shuttle came into view, on track and on schedule, just after 5:53 Pacific time, crossing the California coast at about 15,000 mph in the superthin air 230,000 feet above the Russian River, northwest of San Francisco. It was first picked up on video by a Lockheed engineer in suburban Fairfield, who recorded a bright meteor passing almost directly overhead, not the shuttle itself but the sheath of hot gases around it, and the long, luminous tail of ionized air known as plasma. Only later, after the engineer heard about the accident on television, did he check his tape and realize that he had recorded what appeared to be two pieces coming off the *Columbia* in quick succession, like little flares in its wake. Those pieces were recorded by others as well, along with the third, fourth, and fifth “debris events” that are known to have occurred during the sixty seconds that it took the shuttle to cross California. From the top of Mount Hamilton, southeast of San Francisco, another engineer, the former president of the Peninsula Astronomical Society, caught all five events on tape but, again, did not realize it until afterward. He later said, “I’d seen four re-entries before this one. When we saw it, we did note that it was a little brighter and a little bit

From the speeding shuttle Rick Husband—Air Force test pilot, religious, family man, always wanted to be an astronaut—began to answer. He said, “Roger, ah,” and was cut off on a word that began with “buh . . .” It was the *Columbia*’s last voice transmission.

some good science was done too—particularly pertaining to space flight itself—though none of it was so urgent that it could not have been performed later, under better circumstances, in the under-booked International Space Station. The astronauts aboard the shuttle were smart and accomplished people, and they were deeply committed to human space flight and exploration. They were also team players, by intense selection, and nothing if not wise to the game. From orbit one of them had radioed, “The science we’re doing here is great, and it’s fantastic. It’s leading-edge.” Others had dutifully reported that the planet seems beautiful, fragile, and borderless when seen from such altitudes, and they had expressed their hopes in English and Hebrew for world peace. It was Miracle Whip on Wonder Bread, standard NASA fare. On the ground so little attention was being paid that even the radars that could have been directed upward to track the *Columbia*’s re-entry into the atmosphere—from Vandenberg Air Force Base, or White Sands Missile Range—were sleeping. As a result, no radar record of the breakup exists—only of the metal rain that drifted down over East Texas, and eventually came into the view of air-traffic control.

Along the route, however, stood small numbers of shuttle enthusiasts, who had gotten up early with their video cam-

whiter in color than it normally is. It’s normally a pink-magenta color. But you know, it wasn’t so different that it really flagged us as something wrong. With the naked eye we didn’t see the particles coming off.”

One minute after the *Columbia* left California, as it neared southwestern Utah, the trouble was becoming more obvious to observers on the ground. There had been a bright flash earlier over Nevada, and now debris came off that was large enough to cause multiple secondary plasma trails. North of the Grand Canyon, in Saint George, Utah, a man and his grown son climbed onto a ridge above the county hospital, hoping for the sort of view they had seen several years before, of a fireball going by. It was a sight they remembered as “really neat.” This time was different, though. The son, who was videotaping, started yelling, “Jesus, Dad, there’s stuff falling off!” and the father saw it too, with his naked eyes.

The *Columbia* was flying on autopilot, as is usual, and though it continued to lay flares in its wake, the astronauts aboard remained blissfully unaware of the trouble they were in. They passed smoothly into dawn above the Arizona border, and sailed across the Navajo reservation and on over Albuquerque, before coming to the Texas Panhandle on a perfect descent profile, slowing through 13,400 mph at

210,000 feet five minutes after having crossed the California coastline. Nineteen seconds later, at 7:58:38 central time, they got the first sign of something being a little out of the ordinary: it was a cockpit indication of low tire pressures on the left main landing gear. This was not quite a trivial matter. A blown or deflated main tire would pose serious risks during the rollout after landing, including loss of lateral control and the possibility that the nose would slam down, conceivably leading to a catastrophic breakup on the ground. These scenarios were known, and had been simulated and debated in the inner world of NASA, leading some to believe that the best of the imperfect choices in such a case might be for the crew to bail out—an alternative available only below 30,000 feet and 220 mph of dynamic airspeed.

Nonetheless, for *Columbia's* pilots it was reasonable to assume for the moment that the indication of low pressure was due to a problem with the sensors rather than with the tires themselves, and that the teams of Mission Control engineers at NASA's Johnson Space Center, in Houston, would be able to sort through the mass of automatically transmitted data—the so-called telemetry, which was far more complete than what was available in the cockpit—and to draw the correct conclusion. The reverse side of failures in a machine as complex as the shuttle is that most of them can be worked around, or turn out to be small. In other words, there was no reason for alarm. After a short delay the *Columbia's* commander, Rick Husband, calmly radioed to Mission Control, "And, ah, Houston ..." Sheathed in hot atmospheric gases, the shuttle was slowing through 13,100 mph at 205,000 feet.

Houston did not clearly hear the call.

With the scheduled touchdown now only about fifteen minutes ahead, it was a busy time at Mission Control. Weather reports were coming in from the landing site at the Kennedy Space Center, in Florida. Radar tracking of the shuttle, like the final accurate ground-based navigation, had not yet begun. Sitting at their specialized positions, and monitoring the numbers displayed on the consoles, a few of the flight controllers had begun to sense, just barely, that something was going seriously wrong. The worry was not quite coherent yet. One of the controllers later told me that it amounted to an inexplicable bad feeling in his gut. But it was undeniable nonetheless. For the previous few minutes, since about the time when the shuttle had passed from California to Nevada, Jeff Kling, an engineer who was working the mechanical-systems position known as MMACS (pronounced *Macs*), had witnessed a swarm of erratic indications and sensor failures. The pattern was disconcerting because of the lack of common circuitry that could easily explain the pattern of such failures—a single box that could be blamed.

Kling had been bantering good-naturedly on an intercom with one of his team, a technician sitting in one of the adjoining back rooms and monitoring the telemetry, when the technician noted a strange failure of temperature

transducers on a hydraulic return line. The technician said, "We've had some hydraulic 'ducers go off-scale low."

Kling had seen the same indications. He said, "Well, I guess!"

The technician said, "What in the world?"

Kling said, "This is not funny. On the left side."

The technician confirmed, "On the left side ..."

Now Kling got onto the main control-room intercom to the lead controller on duty, known as the flight director, a man named Leroy Cain. In the jargon-laced language of the control room Kling said, "Flight, Macs."

Cain said, "Go ahead, Macs."

"FYI, I've just lost four separate temperature transducers on the left side of the vehicle, hydraulic return temperatures. Two of them on system one, and one in each of systems two and three."

Cain said, "Four hyd return temps?"

Kling answered, "To the left outboard and left inboard elevon."

"Okay, is there anything common to them? DSC or MDM or anything? I mean, you're telling me you lost them all at exactly the same time?"

"No, not exactly. They were within probably four or five seconds of each other."

Cain struggled to assess the meaning. "Okay, where are those ... where is that instrumentation located?"

Kling continued to hear from his back-room team. He said, "All four of them are located in the aft part of the left wing, right in front of the elevons ... elevon *actuators*. And there is no commonality."

Cain repeated, "No commonality."

But all the failing instruments were in the left wing. The possible significance of this was not lost on Cain: during the launch a piece of solid foam had broken off from the shuttle's external fuel tank, and at high speed had smashed into the left wing; after minimal consideration the shuttle program managers (who stood above Mission Control in the NASA hierarchy) had dismissed the incident as essentially unthreatening. Like almost everyone else at NASA, Cain had taken the managers at their word—and he still did. Nonetheless, the strange cluster of left-wing failures was an ominous development. Kling had more-specific reasons for concern. In a wonkish, engineering way he had discussed with his team the telemetry they might observe if a hole allowed hot gases into the wing during re-entry, and had come up with a profile eerily close to what was happening now. Still, he maintained the expected detachment.

Cain continued to worry the problem. He asked for reassurance from his "guidance, navigation, and control" man, Mike Sarafin. "Everything look good to you, control and rates and everything is nominal, right?"

Sarafin said, "Control's been stable through the rolls that we've done so far, Flight. We have good trims. I don't see anything out of the ordinary."

Cain directed his attention back to Kling: "All other indications for your hydraulic systems indications are good?"

"They're all good. We've had good quantities all the way across."

Cain said, "And the other temps are normal?"

"The other temps are normal, yes, sir." He meant only those that the telemetry allowed him to see.

Cain said, "And when you say you lost these, are you saying they went to zero ..."

"All four of them are off-scale low."

"... or off-scale low?"

Kling said, "And they were all staggered. They were, like I said, within several seconds of each other."

Cain said, "Okay."

But it wasn't okay. Within seconds the *Columbia* had crossed into Texas and the left-tire-pressure indications were dropping, as observed also by the cockpit crew. Kling's informal model of catastrophe had predicted just such indications, whether from blown tires or wire breaks. The end was now coming very fast.

Kling said, "Flight, Macs."

Cain said, "Go."

"We just lost tire pressure on the left outboard and left inboard, both tires."

Cain said, "Copy."

At that moment, twenty-three seconds after 7:59 local time, the Mission Control consoles stopped receiving telemetry updates, for reasons unknown. The astronaut sitting beside Cain, and serving as the Mission Control communicator, radioed, "And *Columbia*, Houston, we see your tire-pressure messages, and we did not copy your last call."

At the same time, on the control-room intercom, Cain was talking again to Kling. He said, "Is it instrumentation, Macs? Gotta be."

Kling said, "Flight, Macs, those are also off-scale low."

From the speeding shuttle Rick Husband—Air Force test pilot, religious, good family man, always wanted to be an astronaut—began to answer the communicator. He said, "Roger, ah," and was cut off on a word that began with "buh ..."

It turned out to be the *Columbia*'s last voice transmission. Brief communication breaks, however, are not abnormal during re-entries, and this one raised no immediate concern in Houston.

People on the ground in Dallas suddenly knew more than the flight controllers in Houston. Four seconds after eight they saw a large piece leave the orbiter and fall away. The shuttle was starting to come apart. It continued intermittently to send telemetry, which though not immediately displayed at Mission Control was captured by NASA computers and later discovered; the story it told was that multiple systems were failing. In quick succession two additional chunks fell off.

Down in the control room Cain said, "And there's no

commonality between all these tire-pressure instrumentations and the hydraulic return instrumentations?"

High in the sky near Dallas the *Columbia*'s main body began to break up. It crackled and boomed, and made a loud rumble.

Kling said, "No, sir, there's not. We've also lost the nose-gear down talkback, and right-main-gear down talkback."

"Nose-gear and right-main-gear down talkbacks?"

"Yes, sir."

At Fort Hood, Texas, two Dutch military pilots who were training in an Apache attack helicopter locked on to the breakup with their optics and videotaped three bright objects—the main rocket engines—flying eastward in formation, among other, smaller pieces and their contrails.

Referring to the loss of communications, one minute after the main-body breakup, Laura Hoppe, the flight controller responsible for the communications systems, said to Cain, "I didn't expect, uh, this bad of a hit on comm."

Cain asked another controller about a planned switchover to a ground-based radio ahead, "How far are we from UHF? Is that two-minute clock good?"

Kling, also, was hanging on to hope. He said, "Flight, Macs."

Cain said, "Macs?"

Kling said, "On the tire pressures, we did see them go erratic for a little bit before they went away, so I do believe it's instrumentation."

"Okay."

At about that time the debris began to hit the ground. It fell in thousands of pieces along a swath ten miles wide and 300 miles long, across East Texas and into Louisiana. There were many stories later. Some of the debris whistled down through the leaves of trees and smacked into a pond where a man was fishing. Another piece went right through a backyard trampoline, evoking a mother's lament: "Those damned kids ..." Still another piece hit the window of a moving car, startling the driver. The heaviest parts flew the farthest. An 800-pound piece of engine hit the ground in Fort Polk, Louisiana, doing 1,400 mph. A 600-pound piece landed nearby. Thousands of people began to call in, swamping the 911 dispatchers with reports of sonic booms and metal falling out of the sky. No one, however, was hit. This would be surprising were it not for the fact, so visible from above, that the world is still a sparsely populated place.

In Houston the controllers maintained discipline, and continued preparing for the landing, even as they received word that the Merritt Island radar, in Florida, which should by now have started tracking the inbound craft, was picking up only false targets. Shuttles arrive on time or they don't arrive at all. But, repeatedly, the communicator radioed, "*Columbia*, Houston, UHF comm check," as if he might still hear a reply. Then, at thirteen minutes past the hour, precisely when the *Columbia* should have been passing over-

head the runway before circling down for a landing at the Kennedy Space Center, a phone call came in from an off-duty controller who had just seen a video broadcast by a Dallas television station of multiple contrails in the sky. When Cain heard the news, he paused, and then put the contingency plan into effect. To the ground-control officer he said, "GC, Flight."

"Flight, GC."

"Lock the doors."

"Copy."

The controllers were stunned, but lacked the time to contemplate the horror of what had just happened. Under Cain's direction they set about collecting numbers, writing notes, and closing out their logs, for the investigation that was certain to follow. The mood in the room was somber and focused. Only the most basic facts were known: the *Columbia* had broken up at 200,000 feet doing 12,738 mph, and the crew could not possibly have survived. Ron Dittmore, the shuttle program manager, would be talking to reporters later that day, and he needed numbers and information. At some point sandwiches were brought in and consumed. Like the priests who harvest faith at the bedsides of the dying, grief counselors showed up too, but they were not much used.

Cain insisted on control-room discipline. He said, "No phone calls off site outside of this room. Our discussions are on these loops—the recorded DVIS loops only. No data, no phone calls, no transmissions anywhere, into or out."

Later this was taken by some critics to be a typical NASA reaction—insular, furtive, overcontrolling. And it may indeed have reflected certain aspects of what had become of the agency's culture. But it was also, more simply, a rule-book procedure meant to stabilize and preserve the crucial last data. The room was being frozen as a crime scene might be. Somewhere inside NASA something had obviously gone very wrong—and it made sense to start looking for the evidence here and now.

Less than an hour later, at 10:00 A.M. eastern time, a retired four-star admiral named Hal Gehman met his brother at a lawyer's office in Williamsburg, Virginia. At the age of sixty, Gehman was a tall, slim, silver-haired man with an unlined face and soft eyes. Dressed in civilian clothes, standing straight but not stiffly so, he had an accessible, unassuming manner that contrasted with the rank and power he had achieved. After an inauspicious start as a mediocre engineering student in the Penn State Naval ROTC program ("Top four fifths of the class," he liked to say), he had skippered a patrol boat through the thick of the Vietnam War and gone on to become an experienced sea captain, the commander of a carrier battle group, vice-chief of the Navy, and finally NATO Atlantic commander and head of the U.S. Joint Forces Command. Upon his retirement, in 2000, from the sixth-ranked position in the U.S.

military, he had given all that up with apparent ease. He had enjoyed a good career in the Navy, but he enjoyed his civilian life now too. He was a rare sort of man—startlingly intelligent beneath his guileless exterior, personally satisfied, and quite genuinely untroubled. He lived in Norfolk in a pleasant house that he had recently remodeled; he loved his wife, his grown children, his mother and father, and all his siblings. He had an old Volkswagen bug convertible, robin's-egg blue, that he had bought from another admiral. He had a modest thirty-four-foot sloop, which he enjoyed sailing in the Chesapeake, though its sails were worn out and he wanted to replace its icebox with a twelve-volt refrigeration unit. He was a patriot, of course, but not a reactionary. He called himself a fiscal conservative and a social moderate. His life as he described it was the product of convention. It was also the product of a strict personal code. He chose not to work with any company doing business with the Department of Defense. He liked power, but understood its limitations. He did not care to be famous or rich. He represented the American establishment at its best.

In the lawyer's office in Williamsburg his brother told him that the *Columbia* had been lost. Gehman had driven there with his radio off and so he had not heard. He asked a few questions, and absorbed the information without much reaction. He did not follow the space program and, like most Americans, had not been aware that a mission was under way. He spent an hour with the lawyer on routine family business. When he emerged, he saw that messages had been left on his cell phone, but because the coverage was poor, he could not retrieve them; only later, while driving home on the interstate, was he finally able to connect. To his surprise, among mundane messages he found an urgent request to call the deputy administrator of NASA, a man he had not heard of before, named Fred Gregory. Like a good American, Gehman made the call while speeding down the highway. Gregory, a former shuttle commander, said, "Have you heard the news?"

Gehman said, "Only secondhand."

Gregory filled him in on what little was known, and explained that part of NASA's contingency plan, instituted after the *Challenger* disaster of 1986, was the activation of a standing "interagency" investigation board. By original design the board consisted of seven high-ranking civilian and military officials who were pre-selected mechanically on the basis of job titles—the institutional slots that they filled. For the *Columbia*, the names were now known: the board would consist of three Air Force generals, John Barry, Kenneth Hess, and Duane Deal; a Navy admiral, Stephen Turcotte; a NASA research director, G. Scott Hubbard; and two senior civil-aviation officials, James Hallock and Steven Wallace. Though only two of these men knew much about NASA or the space shuttle, in various ways each of them was familiar with the complexities of large-scale, high-risk activities.

Most of them also had strong personalities. To be effective they would require even stronger management. Gregory said that it was NASA's administrator, Sean O'Keefe, who wanted Gehman to come in as chairman to lead the work. Gehman was not immune to the compliment, but he was cautious. He had met O'Keefe briefly years before, but did not know him. He wanted to make sure he wasn't being suckered into a NASA sideshow.

O'Keefe was an able member of Washington's revolving-door caste, a former congressional staffer and budget specialist—and a longtime protégé of Vice President Dick Cheney—who through the force of his competence and Republican connections had briefly landed the position of Secretary of the Navy in the early 1990s. He had suffered academic banishment through the Clinton era, but under the current administration had re-emerged as a deputy at the Office of Management and Budget, where he had been assigned to tackle the difficult problem of NASA's cost overruns and lack of delivery, particularly in the Space Station program. It is hard to know what he thought when he was handed the treacherous position of NASA administrator. Inside Washington, NASA's reputation had sunk so low that some of O'Keefe's former congressional colleagues snickered that Cheney was trying to kill his own man off. But O'Keefe was

the right things about carrying on, but rather than involving himself by appointing an independent presidential commission, as Ronald Reagan had in response to the *Challenger* accident, he would keep his distance by expressing faith in NASA's ability to find the cause. In other words, this baby was going to be dropped squarely onto O'Keefe's lap. The White House approved Gehman's appointment to lead what would essentially be NASA's investigation—but O'Keefe could expect little further communication. There was a chance that the President would not even want to receive the final report directly but would ask that it be deposited more discreetly in the White House in-box. He had problems bigger than space on his mind.

Nonetheless, that morning in his car Gehman realized that even with a lukewarm White House endorsement, the position that NASA was offering, if handled correctly, would allow for a significant inquiry into the accident. Gregory made it clear that Gehman would have the full support of NASA's engineers and technical resources in unraveling the physical mysteries of the accident—what actually had happened to the *Columbia* out there in its sheath of fire at 200,000 feet. Moreover, Gehman was confident that if the investigation had to go further, into *why* this accident had occurred, he had the experience necessary to sort through

Attacks against the accident investigation began on the second day, and by midweek they showed no signs of easing. Congress in particular was thundering that Admiral Gehman was a captive investigator, and that his report would be a whitewash.

not a space crusader, as some earlier NASA administrators had been, and he was not about to pick up the fallen banners of the visionaries and try to lead the way forward; he was a tough, level-headed money man, grounded in the realities of Washington, D.C., and sent in on a mission to bring discipline to NASA's budget and performance before moving on. NASA's true believers called him a carpetbagger and resented the schedule pressures that he brought to bear, but in fairness he was a professional manager, and NASA needed one.

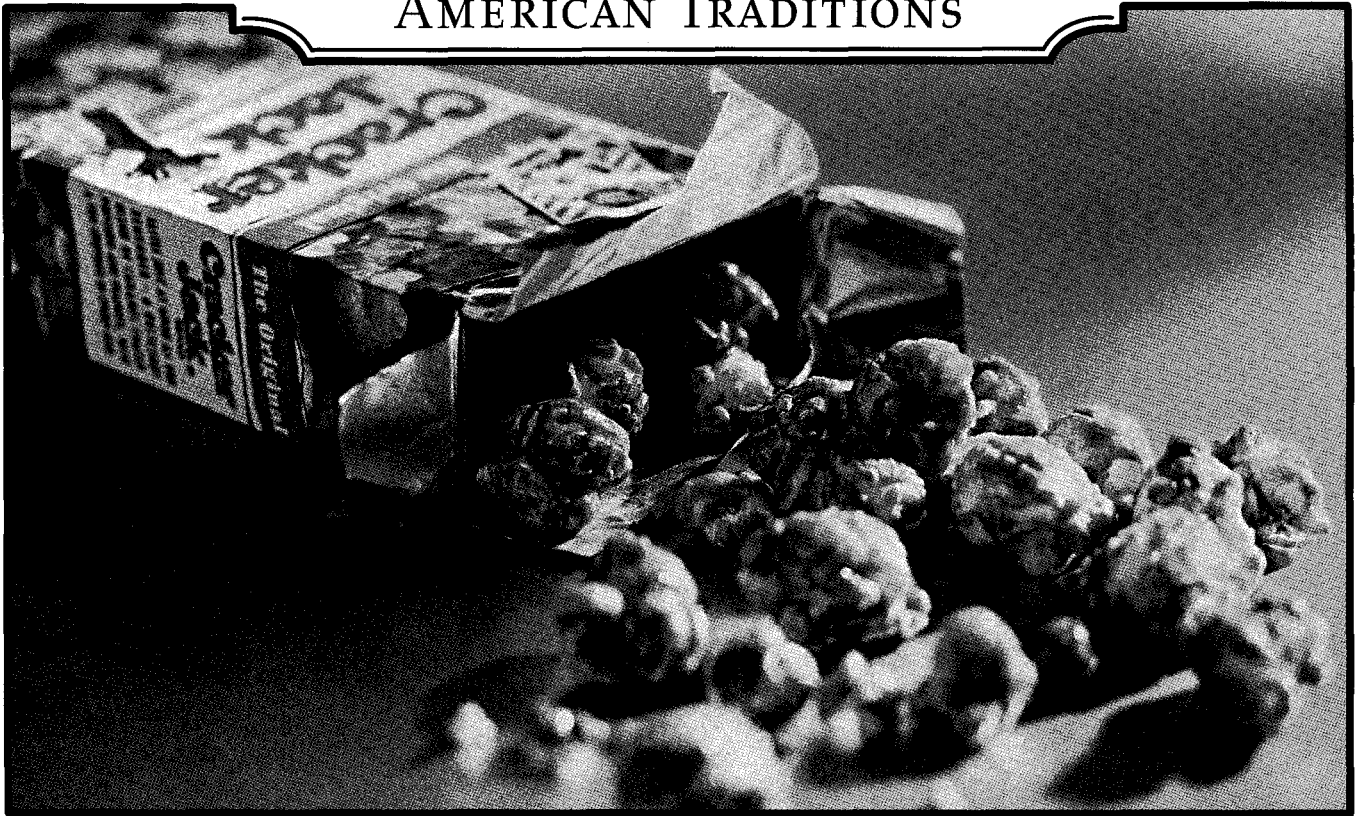
O'Keefe had been at NASA for just over a year when the *Columbia* self-destructed. He was in Florida standing at the landing site beside one of his deputies, a former shuttle commander named William Readdy. At 9:05 eastern time, ten minutes before the scheduled landing, Readdy got word that communications with the shuttle, which had been lost, had not been re-established; O'Keefe noticed that Readdy's face went blank. At 9:10 Readdy opened a book to check a time sequence. He said, "We should have heard the sonic booms by now. There's something really wrong." By 9:29 O'Keefe had activated the full-blown contingency plan. When word got to the White House, the executive staff ducked quickly into defensive positions: President Bush would grieve alongside the families and say

the human complexities of NASA and emerge with useful answers that might result in reform. This may have been overconfident of him, and to some extent utopian, but it was not entirely blind: he had been through big investigations before, most recently two years earlier, just after leaving the Navy, when he and a retired Army general named William Crouch had led an inquiry into the loss of seventeen sailors aboard the USS *Cole*, the destroyer that was attacked and nearly sunk by suicide terrorists in Yemen in October of 2000. Their report found fundamental errors in the functioning of the military command structure, and issued recommendations (largely classified) that are in effect today. The success of the *Cole* investigation was one of the arguments that Gregory used on him now. Gehman did not disagree, but he wanted to be very clear. He said, "I know you've got a piece of paper in front of you. Does it say that I'm not an aviator?"

Gregory said, "We don't need an aviator here. We need an investigator."

And so, driving down the highway to Norfolk, Gehman accepted the job. When he got home, he told his wife that he was a federal employee again and that there wouldn't be much sailing in the spring. That afternoon and evening, as the faxes and phone calls came in, he began to exercise

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control of the process, if only in his own mind, concluding that the board's charter as originally written by NASA would have to be strengthened and expanded, and that its name should immediately be changed from the absurd International Space Station and Space Shuttle Mishap Interagency Investigations Board (the ISSSMIIB) to the more workable *Columbia* Accident Investigation Board, or CAIB, which could be pronounced in one syllable, as *Cabe*.

NASA initially did not resist any of his suggestions. Gregory advised Gehman to head to Barksdale Air Force Base, in Shreveport, Louisiana, where the wreckage was being collected. As Gehman began to explore airline connections, word came that a NASA executive jet, a Gulfstream, would be dispatched to carry him, along with several other board members, directly to Barksdale. The jet arrived in Norfolk on Sunday afternoon, the day after the accident. One of the members already aboard was Steven Wallace, the head of accident investigations for the FAA. Wallace is a second-generation pilot, an athletic, tightly wound man with wide experience in government and a skeptical view of the powerful. He later told me that when Gehman got on the airplane, he was dressed in a business suit, and that, having introduced himself, he explained that they might run into the press, and if they did, he would handle things. This raised some questions about Gehman's motivations (and indeed Gehman turned out to enjoy the limelight), but as Wallace soon discovered, grandstanding was not what Gehman was about. As the Gulfstream proceeded toward Louisiana, Gehman rolled up his sleeves and, sitting at the table in the back of the airplane, began to ask for the thoughts and perspectives of the board members there—not about what might have happened to the *Columbia* but about how best to find out. It was the start of what would become an intense seven-month relationship. It was obvious that Gehman was truly listening to the ideas, and that he was capable of integrating them quickly and productively into his own thoughts. By the end of the flight even Wallace was growing impressed.

But Gehman was in some ways also naive, formed as he had been by investigative experience within the military, in which much of the work proceeds behind closed doors, and conflict of interest is not a big concern. The *Columbia* investigation, he discovered, was going to be a very different thing. Attacks against the CAIB began on the second day, and by midweek, as the board moved from Shreveport to Houston to set up shop, they showed no signs of easing. Congress in particular was thundering that Gehman was a captive investigator, that his report would be a whitewash, and that the White House should replace the CAIB with a *Challenger*-style presidential commission. This came as a surprise to Gehman, who had assumed that he could just go about his business but who now realized that he would have to accommodate these concerns if the final report was to have any credibility at all. Later he said to me, "I didn't go

in thinking about it, but as I began to hear the *independence* thing—"You can't have a panel appointed by NASA investigating itself!"—I realized I'd better deal with Congress." He did this at first mainly by listening on the phone. "They told me what I had to do to build my credibility. I didn't invent it—they *told* me. They also said, 'We hate NASA. We don't trust them. Their culture is no good. And their cost accounting is no good.' And I said, 'Okay.'"

More than that, Gehman came to realize that it was the elected representatives in Congress—and neither O'Keefe nor NASA—who constituted the CAIB's real constituency, and that their concerns were legitimate. As a result of this, along with a growing understanding of the depth and complexity of the work at hand, he forced through a series of changes, establishing a congressional-liaison office, gaining an independent budget (ultimately of about \$20 million), wresting the report from O'Keefe's control, rewriting the stated mission to include the finding of "root causes and circumstances," and hiring an additional five board members, all civilians of unimpeachable reputation: the retired Electric Boat boss Roger Tetrault, the former astronaut Sally Ride, the Nobel-laureate physicist Douglas Osheroff, the aerodynamicist and former Air Force Secretary Sheila Widnall, and the historian and space-policy expert John Logsdon. Afterward, the loudest criticism faded away. Still, Gehman's political judgment was not perfect. He allowed the new civilian members to be brought on through the NASA payroll (at prorated annual salaries of \$134,000)—a strange lapse under the circumstances, and one that led to superficial accusations that the CAIB remained captive. *The Orlando Sentinel* ran a story about the lack of public access to the CAIB's interviews under the ambiguous headline "BOARD PAID TO ENSURE SECRECY." The idea evoked laughter among some of the investigators, who knew the inquiry's direction. But unnecessary damage was done.

Equally unnecessary was Gehman's habit of referring to O'Keefe as "Sean," a clubbish mannerism that led people to conclude, erroneously, that the two men were friends. In fact their relationship was strained, if polite. Gehman told me that he had never asked for the full story behind his selection on the morning of the accident—maybe because it would have been impossible to know the unvarnished truth. Certainly, though, O'Keefe had had little opportunity to contemplate his choice. By quick view Gehman was a steady hand and a good establishment man who could lend the gravitas of his four stars to this occasion; he was also, of course, one of the men behind the *Cole* investigation. O'Keefe later told me that he had read the *Cole* report during his stint as a professor, but that he remembered it best as the subject of a case study presented by one of his academic colleagues as an example of a narrowly focused investigation that, correctly, had not widened beyond its original mandate. This was true,

but a poor predictor of Gehman as a man. His *Cole* investigation had not widened (for instance, into assigning individual blame) for the simple reason that other investigations, by the Navy and the FBI, were already covering that ground. Instead, Gehman and Crouch had gone deep, and relentlessly so. The result was a document that bluntly questioned current American dogma, identified arrogance in the command structure, and critiqued U.S. military assumptions about the terrorist threat. The tone was frank. For example, while expressing understanding of the diplomatic utility of labeling terrorists as “criminals,” the report warned against buying into that language, or into the parallel idea that these terrorists were “cowards.” When, later, I expressed my surprise at his freedom of expression, Gehman did not deny that people have recently been decried as traitors for less. But freedom of expression was clearly his habit: he spoke to me just as openly about the failures of his cherished Navy, of Congress, and increasingly of NASA.

When I mentioned this character trait to one of the new board members, Sheila Widnall, she laughed and said she’d seen it before inside the Pentagon, and that people just didn’t understand the highest level of the U.S. military. These officers are indeed the establishment, she said, but

in to see Gehman, and warned him that the CAIB was headed for a “shipwreck.”

Gehman knew what they meant. In the days following the accident O’Keefe had established an internal Mishap Investigation Team, whose job was to work closely with the CAIB, essentially as staff, and whose members—bizarrely—included some of the decision-makers most closely involved with the *Columbia*’s final flight. The team was led by Linda Ham, a razor-sharp manager in the shuttle program, whose actions during the flight would eventually be singled out as an egregious example of NASA’s failings. Gehman did not know that yet, but it dawned on him that Ham was in a position to filter the inbound NASA reports, and he remembered a recent three-hour briefing that she had run with an iron hand, allowing little room for spontaneous exploration. He realized that she and the others would have to leave the CAIB, and he wrote a careful letter to O’Keefe in Washington, requesting their immediate removal. It is a measure of the insularity at the Johnson Space Center that NASA did not gracefully acquiesce. Ham and another manager, Ralph Roe, in particular reacted badly. In Gehman’s office, alternately in anger and tears, they refused to leave, accusing Gehman of impugning their integrity and asking him how they were supposed to

On the ground level, where the detailed analysis was being done, there was active resistance to the investigation at first, with some NASA engineers openly refusing to cooperate, or to allow access to technical documents. Gehman had to intervene.

they are so convinced of the greatness of the American construct that they will willingly tear at its components in the belief that its failures can be squarely addressed. Almost all of the current generation of senior leaders have also been through the soul-searching that followed the defeat in Vietnam.

O’Keefe had his own understanding of the establishment, and it was probably sophisticated, but he clearly did not anticipate Gehman’s rebellion. By the end of the second week, as Gehman established an independent relationship with Congress and began to break through the boundaries initially drawn by NASA, it became clear that O’Keefe was losing control. He maintained a brave front of wanting a thorough inquiry, but it was said that privately he was angry. The tensions came to the surface toward the end of February, at about the same time that Gehman insisted, over O’Keefe’s resistance, that the full report ultimately be made available to the public. The CAIB was expanding to a staff of about 120 people, many of them professional accident investigators and technical experts who could support the core board members. They were working seven days a week out of temporary office space in the sprawling wasteland of South Houston, just off the property of the Johnson Space Center. One morning several of the board members came

explain their dismissal to others. Gehman suggested to them what Congress had insisted to him—that people simply cannot investigate themselves. Civics 101. Once stated, it seems like an obvious principle.

O’Keefe had a master’s degree in public administration, but he disagreed. It was odd. He had not been with the agency long enough to be infected by its insularity, and as he later promised Congress, he was willing—no, *eager*—to identify and punish any of his NASA subordinates who could be held responsible for the accident. Nonetheless, he decided to defy Gehman, and he announced that his people would remain in place. It was an ill-considered move. Gehman simply went public with his letter, posting it on the CAIB Web site. Gehman understood that O’Keefe felt betrayed—“stabbed in the back” was the word going around—but NASA had left him no choice. O’Keefe surrendered. Ham and the others were reassigned, and the Mishap Investigation Team was disbanded, replaced by NASA staffers who had not been involved in the *Columbia*’s flight and would be more likely to cooperate with the CAIB’s investigators. The board was never able to overcome completely the whiff of collusion that had accompanied its birth, but Gehman had won a significant fight, even if it meant that he and “Sean” would not be friends.

The space shuttle is the most audacious flying machine ever built, an engineering fantasy made real. Before each flight it stands vertically on the launch pad at the Kennedy Space Center, as the core component of a rocket assembly 184 feet tall. The shuttle itself, which is also known as the orbiter, is a winged vehicle roughly the size of a DC-9, with three main rocket engines in the tail, a large unpressurized cargo bay in the midsection, and a cramped two-level crew compartment in the nose. It is attached to a huge external tank containing liquid fuel for the three main engines. That tank in turn is attached to two solid-fuel rockets, known as boosters, which flank the assembly and bear its full weight on the launch pad. Just before the launch, the weight is about 4.5 million pounds, 90 percent of which is fuel. It is a dramatic time, ripe with anticipation; the shuttle vents vapors like a breathing thing; the ground crews pull away until finally no one is left; the air seems unusually quiet.

Typically there are seven astronauts aboard. Four of them sit in the cockpit, and three on the lower level, in the living quarters known as the mid-deck. Because of the shuttle's vertical position, their seats are effectively rotated backward 90 degrees, so they are sitting on their backs, feeling their own weight in a way that tends to emphasize

The flying is done entirely by autopilot unless something goes wrong. Within seconds the assembly rotates and aims on course, tilting slightly off the vertical and rolling so that the orbiter is inverted beneath the external tank. Although the vibrations are heavy enough to blur the instruments, the acceleration amounts to only about 2.5 Gs—a mild sensation of heaviness pressing the astronauts back into their seats. After about forty seconds the shuttle accelerates through Mach 1, 760 mph, at about 17,000 feet, climbing nearly straight up. Eighty seconds later, with the shuttle doing about 3,400 mph and approaching 150,000 feet, the crew can feel the thrust from the solid rocket boosters begin to tail off. Just afterward, with a bright flash and a loud explosion heard inside the orbiter, the rocket boosters separate from the main tank; they continue to travel upward on a ballistic path to 220,000 feet before falling back and parachuting into the sea. Now powered by the main engines alone, the ride turns smooth, and the forces settle down to about 1 G.

One pilot described the sensations to me on the simplest level. He said, "First it's like, 'Hey, this is a rough ride!' and then, 'Hey, I'm on an electric train!' and then, 'Hey, this train's starting to go pretty darned fast!'" Speed is the ultimate goal of the launch sequence. Having climbed steeply into

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gravity's pull. At the front of the cockpit, positioned closer to the instrument panel than is necessary for the typical astronaut's six-foot frame, the commander and the pilot can look straight ahead into space. They are highly trained. They know exactly what they are getting into. Sometimes they have waited years for this moment to arrive.

The launch window may be just a few minutes wide. It is ruled by orbital mechanics, and defined by the track and position of the destination—usually now the unfinished International Space Station. Six seconds before liftoff the three main engines are ignited and throttled up to 100 percent power, producing more than a million pounds of thrust. The shuttle responds with what is known as "the twang," swaying several feet in the direction of the external tank and then swaying back. This is felt in the cockpit. The noise inside is not very loud. If the computers show that the main engines are operating correctly, the solid rocket boosters ignite. The boosters are ferocious devices—the same sort of monsters that upon failure blew the *Challenger* apart. Each of them produces three million pounds of thrust. Once ignited, they cannot be shut off or throttled back. The shuttle lifts off. It accelerates fast enough to clear the launch tower doing about 100 mph, though it is so large that seen from the outside, it appears to be climbing slowly.

ultra-thin air, the shuttle gently pitches over until it is flying nearly parallel to Earth, inverted under the external tank, and thrusting at full power. Six minutes after launch, at about 356,000 feet, the shuttle is doing around 9,200 mph, which is fast, but only about half the speed required to sustain an orbit. It therefore begins a shallow dive, during which it gains speed at the rate of 1,000 mph every twenty seconds—an acceleration so fast that it presses the shuttle against its 3 G limit, and the engines have to be briefly throttled back. At 10,300 mph the shuttle rolls to a head-up position. Passing through 15,000 mph, it begins to climb again, still accelerating at 3 Gs, until, seconds later, in the near vacuum of space, it achieves orbital velocity, or 17,500 mph. The plumes from the main engines wrap forward and dance across the cockpit windows, making light at night like that of Saint Elmo's fire. Only eight and a half minutes have passed since the launch. The main engines are extinguished, and the external tank is jettisoned. The shuttle is in orbit. After further maneuvering it assumes its standard attitude, flying inverted in relation to Earth and tail first as it proceeds around the globe.

For the astronauts aboard, the uphill flight would amount to little more than an interesting ride were it not for the possibility of failures. That possibility, however, is

very real, and as a result the launch is a critical and complicated operation, demanding close teamwork, tight coordination with Mission Control, and above all extreme concentration—a quality often confused with coolness under fire. I was given a taste of this by an active shuttle commander named Michael Bloomfield, who had me strap in beside him in NASA's full-motion simulator in Houston, and take a realistic run from the launch pad into space. Bloomfield is a former Air Force test pilot who has flown three shuttle missions. He had been assigned to assist the CAIB, and had been watching the investigation with mixed emotions—hopeful that some effects might be positive, but concerned as well that the inquiry might veer into formalism without sufficiently taking into account the radical nature of space flight, or the basic truth that every layer of procedure and equipment comes at a cost, often unpredictable. Bloomfield called this the “risk versus risk” tradeoff, and made it real not by defending NASA against specific criticisms but by immersing me, a pilot myself, in the challenges of normal operations.

Much of what he showed me was of the what-if variety, the essence not only of simulator work but also of the crew's real-world thinking. For instance, during the launch, as the shuttle rockets upward on autopilot, the pilots and flight controllers pass through a succession of mental gates, related to various combinations of main-engine failures, at various altitudes and speeds. The options and resulting maneuvers are complicated, ranging from a quick return to the launch site, to a series of tight arrivals at select runways up the eastern seaboard, to transatlantic glides, and finally even an “abort into orbit”—an escape route used by a *Challenger* crew in 1985 after a single main-engine failure. Such failures allow little time to make the right decision. As Bloomfield and I climbed away from Earth, tilted onto our backs, he occasionally asked the operators to freeze the simulation so that he could unfold his thoughts to me. Though the choices were clear, the relative risks were rarely so obvious. It was a deep view into the most intense sort of flying.

After we arrived in space, we continued to talk. One of the gates for engine failure during the climb to the Space Station stands at Mach 21.8 (14,900 mph), the last point allowed for a “high energy” arrival into Gander, Newfoundland, and the start of the emergency transatlantic track for Shannon, Ireland. An abort at that point provides no easy solution. The problem with Gander is how to bleed off excess energy before the landing (Bloomfield called this “a take-all-your-brain-cells type of flying”), whereas the problem with Shannon is just the opposite—how to stretch the glide. Bloomfield told me that immediately before his last space flight, in the spring of 2002, his crew and a Mission Control team had gone through a full-dress simulation during which the orbiter had lost all three engines by Mach 21.7 (less than 100 mph from the decision speed). Confident in his ability to fly the more difficult Canadi-

an arrival, Bloomfield, from the cockpit of the simulator, radioed, “We’re going high-energy into Gander.”

Mission Control answered, “Negative,” and called for Shannon instead.

Bloomfield looked over at his right-seat pilot and said, “I think we oughta go to Gander. What do you think?”

“Yeah.”

Bloomfield radioed back: “No, we think we oughta go to Gander.”

Mission Control was emphatic. “*Negative*. We see you having enough energy to make Shannon.”

As commander, Bloomfield had formal authority for the decision, but Mission Control, with its expert teams and wealth of data, was expressing a strong opinion, so he acquiesced. Acquiescence is standard in such cases, and usually it works out for the best. Bloomfield had enormous respect for the expertise and competence of Mission Control. He was also well aware of errors he had made in the past, despite superior advice or instructions from the flight controllers. This time, however, it turned out that two of the flight controllers had not communicated correctly with each other, and that the judgment of Mission Control therefore was wrong. Lacking the energy to reach Shannon, the simulator went into the ocean well short of the airport. The incident caused a disturbance inside the Johnson Space Center, particularly because of the long-standing struggle for the possession of data (and ultimately control) between the pilots in flight and the engineers at their consoles. Nevertheless, the two groups worked together, hammered out the problems, and the next day flew the same simulator profile successfully. But that was not the point of Bloomfield's story. Rather, it was that these calls are hard to make, and that mistakes—whether his or the controllers’—may become obvious only after it is too late.

For all its realism, the simulator cannot duplicate the gravity load of the climb, or the lack of it at the top. The transition to weightlessness is abrupt, and all the more dramatic because it occurs at the end of the 3 G acceleration: when the main engines cut off, the crew gets the impression of going over an edge and suddenly dropping into a free fall. That impression is completely accurate. In fact the term zero gravity (0 G), which is loosely used to describe the orbital environment, refers to physical acceleration, and does not mean that Earth's gravitational pull has somehow gone away. Far from it: the diminution of gravitational pull that comes with distance is small at these low-orbit altitudes (perhaps 200 miles above the surface), and the shuttle is indeed now falling—about like a stone dropped off a cliff. The fall does not, of course, diminish the shuttle's mass (if it bumps the Space Station, it does so with tremendous force), but it does make the vehicle and everything inside it very nearly weightless. The orbital part of the trick is that though the shuttle is dropping like a stone, it is also progressing across Earth's surface so fast (17,500 mph)

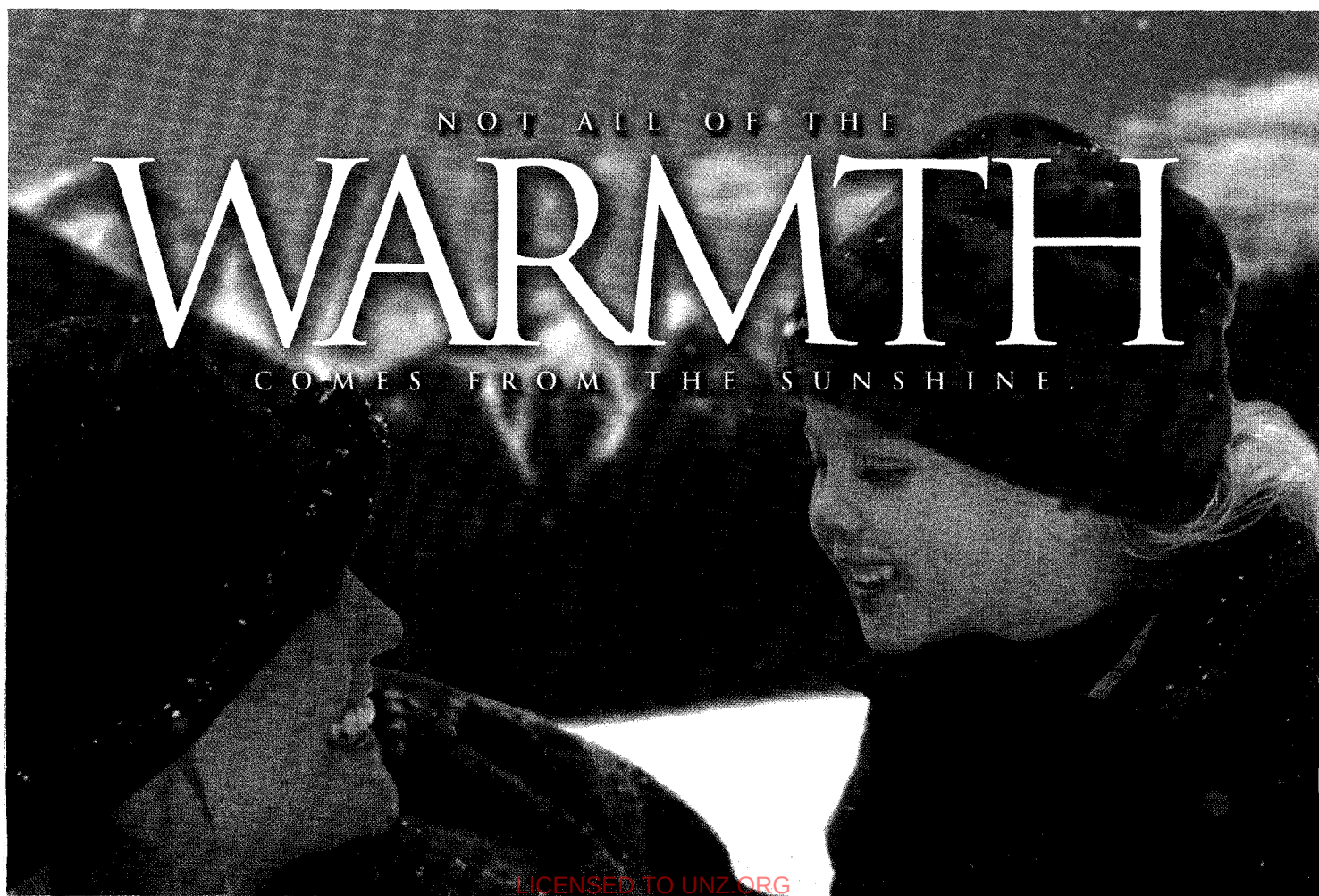
that its path matches (roughly) the curvature of the globe. In other words, as it plummets toward the ground, the ground keeps getting out of its way. Like the orbits of all other satellites, and of the Space Station, and of the Moon as well, its flight is nothing but an unrestricted free fall around and around the world.

To help the astronauts adapt to weightlessness, the quarters are designed with a conventional floor-down orientation. This isn't quite so obvious as it might seem, since the shuttle flies inverted in orbit. "Down" therefore is toward outer space—and the view from the cockpit windows just happens to be of Earth sliding by from behind and overhead. The crews are encouraged to live and work with their heads "up" nonetheless. It is even recommended that they use the ladder while passing through the hatch between the two levels, and that they "descend" from the cockpit to the mid-deck feet first. Those sorts of cautions rarely prevail against the temptations of weightlessness. After Bloomfield's last flight one of his crew commented that they had all been swimming around "like eels in a can." Or like superhumans, as the case may be. It's true that there are frustrations: if you try to throw a switch without first anchoring your body, the switch will throw you. On the other hand, once you are anchored, you can shift multi-ton masses with your fingertips. You can also fly without wings, perform unlimited flips, or simply float for a while, resting

in midair. Weightlessness is bad for the bones, but good for the soul. I asked Bloomfield how it had felt to experience gravity again. He said he remembered the first time, after coming to a stop on the runway in Florida, when he picked up a small plastic checklist in the cockpit and thought, "Man, this is so *heavy*!" He looked at me and said, "Gravity sucks."

And orbital flight clearly does not. The ride is smooth. When the cabin ventilation is turned off, as it must be once a day to exchange the carbon dioxide scrubbers, the silence is absolute. The smell inside the shuttle is distinctly metallic, unless someone has just come in from a spacewalk, after which the quarters are permeated for a while with "the smell of space," a pungent burned odor that some compare to that of seared meat, and that Bloomfield describes as closer to the smell of a torch on steel. The dominant sensation, other than weightlessness, is of the speed across the ground. Bloomfield said, "From California to New York in ten minutes, around the world once in ninety minutes—I mean, we're *moving*." He told me that he took to loitering in the cockpit at the end of the workdays, just for the view. By floating forward above the instrument panel and wrapping his legs around one of the pilot seats, he could position his face so close to the front windshield that the structure of the shuttle would seem to disappear.

The view from there was etched into his memory as a



continuous loop. In brief, he said: It's night and you're coming up on California, with that clearly defined coastline, and you can see all the lights all the way from Tijuana to San Francisco, and then it's behind you, and you spot Las Vegas and its neon-lit Strip, which you barely have time to identify before you move across the Rockies, with their helter-skelter of towns, and then across the Plains, with its monotony of look-alike wheels and spokes of light, until you come to Chicago and its lakefront, from which point you can see past Detroit and Cleveland all the way to New York. These are big cities, you think. And because you grew up on a farm in Michigan, played football there in high school, and still know it like a home, you pick out Ann Arbor and Flint, and the place where I-75 joins U.S. Highway 23, and you get down to within a couple of miles of your house before zip, you're gone. Zip goes Cleveland, and zip New York, and then you're out over the Atlantic beyond Maine, looking back down the eastern seaboard all the way past Washington, D.C. Ten minutes later you come up on Europe, and you hardly have time to think that London is a sprawl, France is an orderly display, the Alps are the Rockies again, and Italy is indeed a boot. Over Sicily you peer down into Etna's crater, into the glow of molten rock on Earth's inside, and then you are crossing Africa, where the few lights you see are not yellow but orange, like open flames. Past the Equator and beyond Madagascar you come to a zone of

gray between the blackness of the night and the bright blue of the day. At the center of that zone is a narrow pink slice, which is the atmospheric dawn as seen from above. Daylight is for the oceans—first the Indian and then the Pacific, which is very, very large. Atolls appear with coral reefs and turquoise lagoons, but mostly what you see is cloud and open water. Then the pink slice of sunset passes below, and the night, and soon afterward you come again to California, though at another point on the coast, because ninety minutes have passed since you were last here, and during that time the world has revolved beneath you.

Ultimately the shuttle must return to Earth and land. The problem then is what to do with the vast amount of physical energy that has been invested in it—almost all the calories once contained in the nearly four million pounds of rocket fuel that was used to shove the shuttle into orbit. Some of that energy now resides in the vehicle's altitude, but most resides in its speed. The re-entry is a descent to a landing, yes, but primarily it is a giant deceleration, during which atmospheric resistance is used to convert velocity into heat, and to slow the shuttle by roughly 17,000 mph, so that it finally passes overhead the runway in Florida at airline speeds, and circles down to touch the ground at a well tamed 224 mph or less. Once the shuttle is on the runway, the drag chute and brakes take care of the rest.

The re-entry is a one-way ride that cannot be stopped



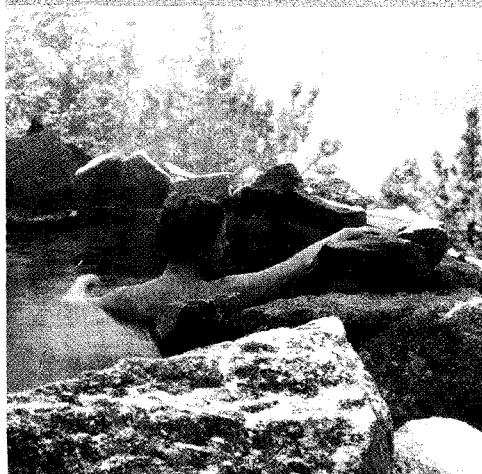
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once it has begun. The opening move occurs while the shuttle is still proceeding tail first and inverted, halfway around the world from the runway, high above the Indian Ocean. It is a simple thing, a brief burn by the twin orbital maneuvering rockets against the direction of flight, which slows the shuttle by perhaps 200 mph. That reduction is enough. The shuttle continues to free-fall as it has in orbit, but it now lacks the speed to match the curvature of Earth, so the ground no longer gets out of its way. By the time it reaches the start of the atmosphere, the "entry interface" at 400,000 feet, it has gently flipped itself around so that it is right-side up and pointed for Florida, but with its nose held 40 degrees higher than the angle of the descent path. The effect of this so-called angle of attack (which technically refers to the wings, not the nose) is to create drag, and to shield the shuttle's internal structures from the intense re-entry heat by cocking the vehicle up to greet the atmosphere with leading edges made of heat-resistant carbon-composite panels, and with 24,305 insulating surface tiles, each one unique, which are glued primarily to the vehicle's underside. To regulate the sink and drag (and to control the heating), the shuttle goes through a program of sweeping S-turns, banking as steeply as 80 degrees to one side and then the other, tilting its lift vector and digging into the atmosphere. The thinking is done by redundant computers, which use onboard inertial sensing systems to gauge the shuttle's position, altitude, descent rate, and speed. The flying is done by autopilot. The cockpit crews and mission controllers play the role of observers, albeit extremely interested ones who are ready to intervene should something go wrong. In a basic sense, therefore, the re-entry is a mirror image of the launch and climb, decompressed to forty-five minutes instead of eight, but with the added complication that it will finish with the need for a landing.

Bloomfield took me through it in simulation, the two of us sitting in the cockpit to watch while an experienced flight crew and full Mission Control team brought the shuttle in from the de-orbit burn to the touchdown, dealing with a complexity of cascading system failures. Of course, in reality the automation usually performs faultlessly, and the shuttle proceeds to Florida right on track, and down the center of the desired descent profile. Bloomfield expressed surprise at how well the magic had worked on his own flights. Because he had launched on high-inclination orbits to the Russian station Mir and the International Space Station, he had not flown a *Columbia*-style re-entry over the United States, but had descended across Central America instead. He said, "You look down over Central America, and you're so low that you can see the forests! You think, 'There's no way we're going to make it to Florida!' Then you cross the west coast of Florida, and you look inside, and you're still doing Mach 5, and you think, 'There's no way we're going to slow in time!'" But you do. Mach 5 is 3,500 mph. At that point the shuttle is at 117,000 feet, about 140 miles out. At

Mach 2.5, or 1,650 mph, it is at 81,000 feet, about sixty miles out. At that point the crew activates the head-up displays, which project see-through flight guidance into the field of vision through the windshield. When the shuttle slows below the speed of sound, it shudders as the shock waves shift. By tradition if not necessity, the commander then takes over from the autopilot, and flies the rest of the arrival manually, using the control stick.

Bloomfield invited me to fly some simulated arrivals myself, and prompted me while I staggered around for a few landings—overhead the Kennedy Space Center at 30,000 feet with the runway and the coastal estuaries in sight below, banking left into a tight, plunging energy-management turn, rolling out onto final approach at 11,000 feet, following an extraordinarily steep, 18-degree glide slope at 345 mph, speed brakes on, pitching up through a "pre-flare" at 2,000 feet to flatten the descent, landing gear out at 300 feet, touching down on the main wheels with some skips and bumps, then drag chute out, nose gear gently down, and brakes on. My efforts were crude, and greatly assisted by Bloomfield, but they gave me an impression of the shuttle as a solid, beautifully balanced flying machine that in thick air, at the end, is responsive and not difficult to handle—if everything goes just right. Bloomfield agreed. Moreover, years have passed in which everything did go just right—leaving the pilots to work on the finesse of their touchdowns, whether they were two knots fast, or 100 feet long. Bloomfield said, "When you come back and you land, the engineers will pull out their charts and they'll say things like 'The boundary layer tripped on the left wing before the right one. Did you feel anything?' And the answer is always 'Well ... no. It was an incredibly smooth ride all the way down.'" But then, on the morning of February 1, something went really wrong—something too radical for simulation, that offered the pilots no chance to fly—and the *Columbia* lay scattered for 300 miles across the ground.

The foam did it. That much was suspected from the start, and all the evidence converged on it as the CAIB's investigation proceeded through the months that followed. The foam was dense and dry; it was the brownish-orange coating applied to the outside of the shuttle's large external tank to insulate the extreme cold of the rocket fuels inside from the warmth and moisture of the air. Eighty-two seconds after liftoff, as the *Columbia* was accelerating through 1,500 mph, a piece of that foam—about nineteen inches long by eleven inches wide, weighing about 1.7 pounds—broke off from the external tank and collided with the left wing at about 545 mph. Cameras near the launch site recorded the event—though the images when viewed the following day provided insufficient detail to know the exact impact point, or the consequences. The CAIB's investigation ultimately found that a gaping hole about ten inches across had been punched into the wing's

leading edge, and that sixteen days later the hole allowed the hot gases of the re-entry to penetrate the wing and consume it from the inside. Through enormous effort this would be discovered and verified beyond doubt. It was important nonetheless to explore the alternatives. In an effort closely supervised by the CAIB, groups of NASA engineers created several thousand flow charts, one for each scenario that could conceivably have led to the re-entry breakup. The thinking was rigorous. For a scenario to be “closed,” meaning set aside, absolute proof had to be found (usually physical or mathematical) that this particular explanation did not apply: there was no cockpit fire, no flight-control malfunction, no act of terrorism or sabotage that had taken the shuttle down. Unexpected vulnerabilities were found during this process, and even after the investigation was formally concluded, in late August, more than a hundred scenarios remained technically open, because they could not positively be closed. For lack of evidence to the contrary, for instance, neither bird strikes nor micrometeorite impacts could be completely ruled out.

But for all their willingness to explore less likely alternatives, many of NASA’s managers remained stubbornly closed-minded on the subject of foam. From the earliest telemetric data it was known that intense heat inside the

through the investigation, I’ve been looking for signs where the system is trying to defend itself.” Of those signs the most obvious was this display of blind faith by an organization dependent on its engineering cool; NASA, in its absolute certainty, was unintentionally signaling the very problem that it had. Gehman had seen such certainty proved wrong too many times, and he told me that he was not about to get “rolled by the system,” as he had been rolled before. He said, “Now when I hear NASA telling me things like ‘Gotta be true!’ or ‘We know this to be true!’ all my alarm bells go off ... Without hurting anybody’s feelings, or squashing people’s egos, we’re having to say, ‘We’re sorry, but we’re not *accepting* that answer.’”

That was the form that the physical investigation took on, with hundreds of NASA engineers and technicians doing most of the detailed work, and the CAIB watching closely and increasingly stepping in. Despite what Gehman said, it was inevitable that feelings got hurt and egos squashed—and indeed that serious damage to people’s lives and careers was inflicted. At the NASA facilities dedicated to shuttle operations (Alabama for rockets, Florida for launch and landing, Texas for management and mission control) the CAIB investigators were seen as invaders of sorts, unwelcome strangers arriving to pass judgment on people’s good-

For all their willingness to explore less likely alternatives, many of NASA’s managers were stubbornly closed-minded on the subject of foam. NASA balked at going down that road. The reasons were not rational and scientific but, rather, complex and cultural.

left wing had destroyed the *Columbia*, and that such heat could have gotten there only through a hole. The connection between the hole and the foam strike was loosely circumstantial at first, but it required serious consideration nonetheless. NASA balked at going down that road. Its reasons were not rational and scientific but, rather, complex and cultural, and they turned out to be closely related to the errors that had led to the accident in the first place: simply put, it had become a matter of faith within NASA that foam strikes—which were a known problem—could not cause mortal damage to the shuttle. Sean O’Keefe, who was badly advised by his NASA lieutenants, made unwise public statements deriding the “foamologists”; and even Ron Dittemore, NASA’s technically expert shuttle program manager, joined in with categorical denials.

At the CAIB, Gehman, who was not unsympathetic to NASA, watched these reactions with growing skepticism and a sense of déjà vu. Over his years in the Navy, and as a result of the *Cole* inquiry, he had become something of a student of large organizations under stress. To me he said, “It has been scorched into my mind that bureaucracies will do anything to defend themselves. It’s not evil—it’s just a natural reaction of bureaucracies, and since NASA is a bureaucracy, I expect the same out of them. As we go

faith efforts. On the ground level, where the detailed analysis was being done, there was active resistance at first, with some NASA engineers openly refusing to cooperate, or to allow access to records and technical documents that had not been pre-approved for release. Gehman had to intervene. One of the toughest and most experienced of the CAIB investigators later told me he had a gut sense that NASA continued to hide relevant information, and that it does so to this day. But cooperation between the two groups gradually improved as friendships were made, and the intellectual challenges posed by the inquiry began to predominate over fears about what had happened or what might follow. As so often occurs, it was on an informal basis that information flowed best, and that much of the truth was discovered.

Board member Steven Wallace described the investigation not as a linear path but as a picture that gradually filled in. Or as a jigsaw puzzle. The search for debris began the first day, and soon swelled to include more than 25,000 people, at a cost of well over \$300 million. NASA received 1,459 debris reports, including some from nearly every state in the union, and also from Canada, Jamaica, and the Bahamas. Discounting the geographic extremes, there was still a lot to follow up on. Though the amateur videos showed pieces separating from the shuttle along the entire

path over the United States, and though search parties backtracked all the way to the Pacific coast in the hope of finding evidence of the breakup's triggering mechanism, the westernmost piece found on the ground was a left-wing tile that landed near a town called Littlefield, in the Texas Panhandle. Not surprisingly, the bulk of the wreckage lay under the main breakup, from south of Dallas eastward across the rugged, snake-infested brushland of East Texas and into Louisiana; and that is where most of the search took place. The best work was done on foot, by tough and dedicated crews who walked in tight lines across several thousand square miles. Their effort became something of a close sampling of the American landscape, turning up all sorts of odds and ends, including a few apparent murder victims, plenty of junked cars, and the occasional clandestine meth lab. More to the point, it also turned up crew remains and more than 84,000 pieces of the *Columbia*, which, at 84,900 pounds, accounted for 38 percent of the vehicle's dry weight. Certain pieces that had splashed into the murky waters of lakes and reservoirs were never found. It was presumed that most if not all the remaining pieces had been vaporized by the heat of re-entry, either before or after the breakup.

Some of the shuttle's contents survived intact. For instance, a vacuum cleaner still worked, as did some computers

onto the aft rocket pods. The evidence was complicated because it resulted from combinations of heat, physical forces, and wildly varying airflows that had occurred before, during, and after the main-body breakup, but for Goodman it was beginning to read like a map. He had faith. He said, "We know what we have on the ground. It's the truth. The debris is the truth, if we can only figure out what it's saying. It's not a theoretical model. It exists." Equally important was the debris that did not exist, most significantly large parts of the left wing, including the lower part of a section of the RCC leading edge, a point known as Panel Eight, which was approximately where the launch cameras showed that the foam had hit. Goodman said, "We look at what we don't have. What we do have. What's *on* what we have. We start from there, and try to work backwards up the timeline, always trying to see the previous significant event." He called this "looking uphill." It was like a movie run in reverse, with the found pieces springing off the ground and flying upward to a point of reassembly above Dallas, and then the *Columbia*, looking nearly whole, flying tail-first toward California, picking up the Littlefield tile as it goes, and then higher again, through entry interface over the Pacific, through orbits flown in reverse, inverted but nose first, and then back down toward Earth, picking up the external tank and the

Some of the *Columbia*'s contents survived intact. A vacuum cleaner still worked, as did some computers and a Medtronic Tono-Pen. A group of worms from one of the science experiments not only survived but continued to multiply.

and printers and a Medtronic Tono-Pen, used to measure ocular pressure. A group of worms from one of the science experiments not only survived but continued to multiply. Most of the debris, however, was a twisted mess. The recovered pieces were meticulously plotted and tagged, and transported to a hangar at the Kennedy Space Center, where the wing remnants were laid out in correct position on the floor, and what had been found of the left wing's reinforced carbon-carbon (RCC) leading edge was reconstructed in a transparent Plexiglas mold—though with large gaps where pieces were missing. The hangar was a quiet, poignant, intensely focused place, with many of the same NASA technicians who had prepared the *Columbia* for flight now involved in the sad task of handling its ruins. The assembly and analysis went on through the spring. One of the principal CAIB agents there was an affable Air Force pilot named Patrick Goodman, an experienced accident investigator who had made both friends and enemies at NASA for the directness of his approach. When I first met him, outside the hangar on a typically warm and sunny Florida day, he explained some of the details that I had just seen on the inside—heat-eroded tiles, burned skin and structure, and aluminum slag that had emerged in molten form from inside the left wing, and had been deposited

solid rocket boosters during the descent, and settling tail-first with rockets roaring, until just before a vertical touchdown a spray of pulverized foam appears below, pulls together at the left-wing leading edge, and rises to lodge itself firmly on the side of the external tank.

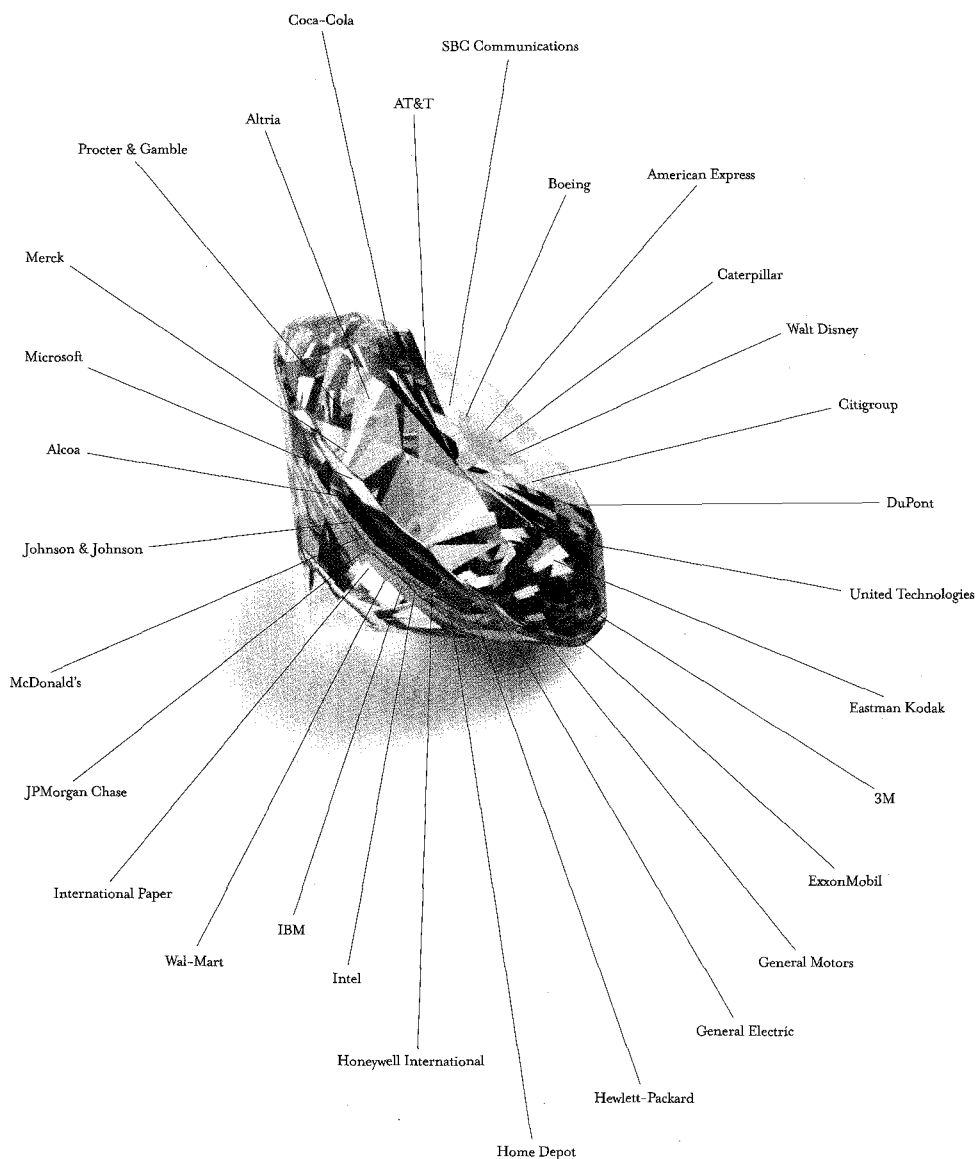
The foam did it.

There was plenty of other evidence, too. After the accident the Air Force dug up routine radar surveillance tapes that upon close inspection showed a small object floating alongside the *Columbia* on the second day of its mission. The object slowly drifted away and disappeared from view. Subsequent testing of radar profiles and ballistic coefficients for a multitude of objects found a match for only one—a fragment of RCC panel of at least 140 square inches. The match never quite passed muster as proof, but investigators presumed that the object was a piece of the leading edge, that it had been shoved into the inside of the wing by the impact of the foam, and that during maneuvering in orbit it had floated free. The picture by now was rapidly filling in.

But the best evidence was numerical. It so happened that because the *Columbia* was the first of the operational shuttles, it was equipped with hundreds of additional engineering sensors that fed into an onboard data-collection

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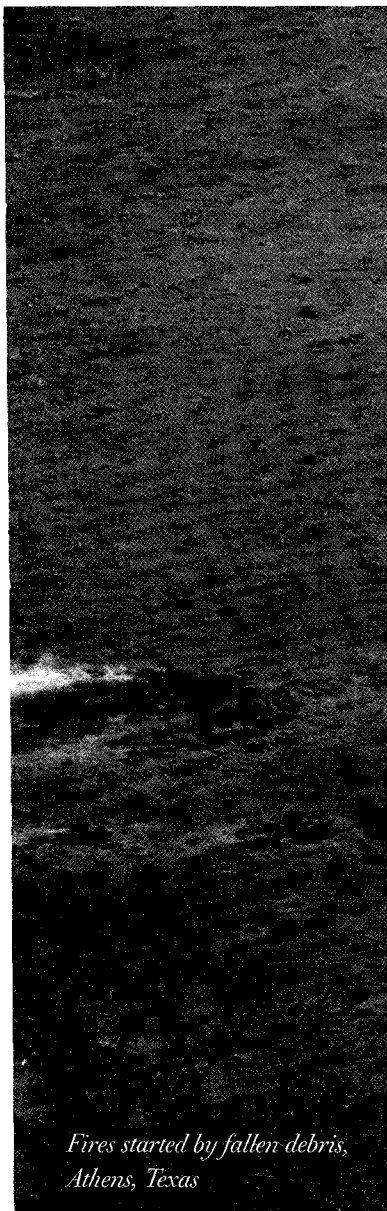
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device, a box known as a modular auxiliary data system, or MADS recorder, that was normally used for postflight analysis of the vehicle's performance. During the initial debris search this box was not found, but such was its potential importance that after careful calculation of its likely ballistic path, another search was mounted, and on March 19 it was discovered—lying in full view on ground that had been gone over before. The really surprising thing was its condition. Though the recorder was not designed to be crash-proof, and used Mylar tape that was vulnerable to heat, it had survived the breakup and fall completely intact, as had the data that it contained, the most interesting of which pertained to heat rises and sequential sensor failures inside the left wing. When combined with the telemetric data that already existed, and with calculations of the size and location of the sort of hole that might have been punched through the leading edge by the foam, the new data allowed for a good fit with computational models of the theoretical

airflow and heat propagation inside the left wing, and it steered the investigation to an inevitable conclusion that the breach must have been in the RCC at Panel Eight.

By early summer the picture was clear. Though strictly speaking the case was circumstantial, the evidence against the foam was so persuasive that there remained no reasonable doubt about the physical cause of the accident. As a result, Gehman gave serious consideration to NASA's request to call off a planned test of the launch incident, during which a piece of foam would be carefully fired at a fully rigged RCC Panel Eight. NASA's argument against the test had some merit: the leading-edge panels (forty-four per shuttle) are custom-made, \$700,000 components, each one different from the others, and the testing would require the use of the last spare Panel Eight in the entire fleet. NASA said that it couldn't afford the waste, and Gehman was inclined to agree, precisely because he felt that breaking the panel would prove nothing that hadn't already been amply



*Fires started by fallen debris,
Athens, Texas*

proved. By a twist of fate it was the sole NASA member of the CAIB, the quiet, cerebral, earnestly scientific Scott Hubbard, who insisted that the test proceed. Hubbard was one of the original seven board members. At the time of the accident he had just become the director of NASA's Ames Research Center, in California. Months later now, in the wake of Gehman's rebellion, and with the CAIB aggressively moving beyond the physical causes and into the organizational ones, he found himself in the tricky position of collaborating with a group that many of his own people at NASA saw as the enemy. Hubbard, however, had an almost childlike belief in doing the right thing, and having been given this unfortunate job, he was determined to see it through correctly. Owing to the closeness of his ties to NASA, he understood an aspect of the situation that others might have overlooked: despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, many people at NASA con-

tinued stubbornly to believe that the foam strike on launch could *not* have caused the *Columbia's* destruction. Hubbard argued that if NASA was to have any chance of self-reform, these people would have to be confronted with reality, not in abstraction but in the most tangible way possible. Gehman found the argument convincing, and so the foam shot proceeded.

The work was done in San Antonio, using a compressed-nitrogen gun with a thirty-five-foot barrel, normally used to fire dead chickens—real and artificial—against aircraft structures in bird-strike certification tests. NASA approached the test kicking and screaming all the way, insisting, for instance, that the shot be used primarily to validate an earlier debris-strike model (the so-called Crater model of strikes against the underside tiles) that had been used for decision-making during the flight, and was now known to be irrelevant. Indeed, it was because of NASA obstructionism—and specifically the illogical insistence by some of the NASA

rocket engineers that the chunk of foam that had hit the wing was significantly smaller (and therefore lighter) than the video and film record showed it to be—that the CAIB and Scott Hubbard finally took direct control of the testing. There was in fact a series of foam shots, increasingly realistic according to the evolving analysis of the actual strike, that raised the stakes from a glancing blow against the underside tiles to steeper-angle hits directly against leading-edge panels. The second to last shot was a 22-degree hit against the bottom of Panel Six: it produced some cracks and other damage deemed too small to explain the shuttle's loss. Afterward there was some smugness at NASA, and even Sean O'Keefe, who again was badly advised, weighed in on the matter, belittling the damage. But the shot against Panel Six was not yet the real thing. That was saved for the precious Panel Eight, in a test that was painstakingly designed to duplicate (conservatively) the actual impact against the *Columbia's* left wing, assuming a rotational "clocking angle" 30 degrees off vertical for the piece of foam. Among the engineers who gathered to watch were many of those still living in denial. The gun fired, and the foam hit the panel at a 25-degree relative angle at about 500 mph. Immediately afterward an audible gasp went through the crowd. The foam had knocked a hole in the RCC large enough to allow people to put their heads through. Hubbard told me that some of the NASA people were close to tears. Gehman had stayed away in order to avoid the appearance of gloating. He could not keep the satisfaction out of his voice, however, when later he said to me, "Their whole house of cards came falling down."

NASA's house was by then what this investigation was really all about. The CAIB discovered that on the morning of January 17, the day after the launch, the low-level engineers at the Kennedy Space Center whose job was to review the launch videos and film were immediately concerned by the size and speed of the foam that had struck the shuttle. As expected of them, they compiled the imagery and disseminated it by e-mail to various shuttle engineers and managers—most significantly those in charge of the shuttle program at the Johnson Space Center. Realizing that their blurred or otherwise inadequate pictures showed nothing of the damage that might have been inflicted, and anticipating the need for such information by others, the engineers at Kennedy then went outside normal channels and on their own initiative approached the Department of Defense with a request that secret military satellites or ground-based high-resolution cameras be used to photograph the shuttle in orbit. After a delay of several days for the back-channel request to get through, the Air Force proved glad to oblige, and made the first moves to honor the request. Such images would probably have shown a large hole in the left wing—but they were never taken.

When news of the foam strike arrived in Houston, it did not seem to be crucially important. Though foam was not supposed to shed from the external tank, and the shuttle was not designed to withstand its impacts, falling foam had plagued the shuttle from the start, and indeed had caused damage on most missions. The falling foam was usually popcorn sized, too small to cause more than superficial dents in the thermal protection tiles. The CAIB, however, discovered a history of more-serious cases. For example, in 1988 the shuttle *Atlantis* took a heavy hit, seen by the launch cameras eighty-five seconds into the climb, nearly the same point at which the *Columbia* strike occurred. On the second day of the *Atlantis* flight Houston asked the crew to inspect the vehicle's underside with a video camera on a robotic arm (which the *Columbia* did not have). The commander, Robert "Hoot" Gibson, told the CAIB that the belly looked as if it had been blasted with shotgun fire. The *Atlantis* returned safely anyway, but afterward was found to have lost an entire tile, exposing its bare metal belly to the re-entry heat. It was lucky that the damage had happened in a place where a heavy aluminum plate covered the skin, Gibson said, because otherwise the belly might have been burned through.

Nonetheless, over the years foam strikes had come to be seen within NASA as an "in-family" problem, so familiar that

goal be after that? Maybe we should bring our pets up there! 'I wonder how a Saint Bernard urinates in zero gravity!' NASA sold the International Space Station to Congress as a great science center—but most scientists just don't agree with that. We're thirty years from being able to go to Mars. Meanwhile, the only reason to have man in space is to study man in space. You can do that stuff—okay—and there are also some biology experiments that are kind of fun. I think we *are* learning things. But I would question any statement that you can come up with better drugs in orbit than you can on the ground, or that sort of thing. The truth is, the International Space Station has become a huge liability for NASA"—expensive to build, expensive to fly, expensive to resupply. "Now members of Congress are talking about letting its orbit decay—just letting it fall into the ocean. And it does turn out that orbital decay is a very good thing, because it means that near space is a self-cleaning place. I mean, garbage does not stay up there forever."

In other words, completion of the Space Station could provide a measure of NASA's performance only in the most immediate and superficial manner, and it was therefore an inherently poor reason for shuttle managers to be ignoring the foam strikes and proceeding at full speed. It was here that you could see the limitations of leadership without

Falling foam had plagued the shuttle from the start, and indeed had caused damage on most missions. In 1988 the *Atlantis* took a heavy hit. Its commander told the CAIB that the shuttle's belly looked as if it had been blasted with shotgun fire.

even the most serious episodes seemed unthreatening and mundane. Douglas Osheroff, a normally good-humored Stanford physicist and Nobel laureate who joined the CAIB late, went around for months in a state of incredulity and dismay at what he was learning about NASA's operational logic. He told me that the shuttle managers acted as if they thought the frequency of the foam strikes had somehow reduced the danger that the impacts posed. His point was not that the managers really believed this but that after more than a hundred successful flights they had come blithely to accept the risk. He said, "The excitement that only exists when there is danger was kind of gone—even though the danger was not gone." And frankly, organizational and bureaucratic concerns weighed more heavily on the managers' minds. The most pressing of those concerns were the new performance goals imposed by Sean O'Keefe, and a tight sequence of flights leading up to a drop-dead date of February 19, 2004, for the completion of the International Space Station's "core." O'Keefe had made it clear that meeting this deadline was a test, and that the very future of NASA's human space-flight program was on the line.

From Osheroff's scientific perspective, deadlines based on completion of the International Space Station were inherently absurd. To me he said, "And what would the next

vision, and the consequences of putting an executive like O'Keefe in charge of an organization that needed more than mere discipline. This, however, was hardly an argument that the managers could use, or even in private allow themselves to articulate. If the Space Station was unimportant—and perhaps even a mistake—then one had to question the reason for the shuttle's existence in the first place. Like O'Keefe and the astronauts and NASA itself, the managers were trapped by a circular space policy thirty years in the making, and they had no choice but to strive to meet the timelines directly ahead. As a result, after the most recent *Atlantis* launch, in October of 2002, during which a chunk of foam from a particularly troublesome part of the external tank, known as the "bipod ramp," had dented one of the solid rocket boosters, shuttle managers formally decided during the post-flight review not to classify the incident as an "in-flight anomaly." This was the first time that a serious bipod-ramp incident had escaped such a classification. The decision allowed the following two launches to proceed on schedule. The second of those launches was the *Columbia*'s, on January 16.

The videos of the foam strike reached Houston the next day, January 17. They made it clear that again the offending material had come from the area of the bipod ramp, that this

e l e v a t e performance

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time the foam was larger than ever before, that the impact had occurred later in the climb (meaning at higher speed), and that the wing had been hit, though exactly where was not clear. The astronauts were happily in orbit now, and had apparently not felt the impact, or been able to distinguish it from the heavy vibrations of the solid rocket boosters. In other words, they were unaware of any trouble. Responsibility for disposing of the incident lay with engineers on the ground, and specifically with the Mission Management Team, or MMT, whose purpose was to make decisions about the problems and unscripted events that inevitably arose during any flight. The MMT was a high-level group. In the Houston hierarchy it operated above the flight controllers in the Mission Control room, and just below the shuttle program manager, Ron Dittemore. Dittemore was traveling at the time, and has since retired. The MMT meetings were chaired by his protégé, the once rising Linda Ham, who has come to embody NASA's arrogance and insularity in many observers' minds. Ham is the same hard-charging manager who, with a colleague, later had to be forcefully separated from the CAIB's investigation. Within the strangely neutered engineering world of the Johnson Space Center, she was an intimidating figure, a youngish, attractive woman given to wearing revealing clothes, yet also known for a tough and domineering management style. Among the lower ranks she had a reputation for brooking no nonsense and being a little hard to talk to. She was not smooth. She was a woman struggling upward in a man's world. She was said to have a difficult personality.

As the head of the MMT, Ham responded to news of the foam strike as if it were just another item to be efficiently handled and then checked off the list: a water leak in the science lab, a radio communication failure, a foam strike on the left wing, okay, no safety-of-flight issues here—right? What's next? There was a trace of vanity in the way she ran her shows. She seemed to revel in her own briskness, in her knowledge of the shuttle systems, in her use of acronyms and the strange, stilted syntax of aerospace engineers. She was decisive, and very sure of her sense for what was important and what was not. Her style got the best of her on day six of the mission, January 21, when at a recorded MMT meeting she spoke just a few words too many, much to her later regret.

It was at the end of a report given by a mid-ranking engineer named Don McCormack, who summarized the progress of an ad hoc engineering group, called the Debris Assessment Team, that had been formed at a still lower level to analyze the foam strike. The analysis was being done primarily by Boeing engineers, who had dusted off the soon to be notorious Crater model, primarily to predict damage to the underwing tile. McCormack reported that little was yet resolved, that the quality of the Crater as a predictor was being judged against the known damage on earlier flights, and that some work was being done to explore the options

should the analysis conclude that the *Columbia* had been badly wounded. After a brief exchange Ham cut him short, saying, "And I'm really ... I don't think there is much we can do, so it's not really a factor during the flight, since there is not much we can do about it." She was making assumptions, of course, and they were later proved to be completely wrong, but primarily she was just being efficient, and moving the meeting along. After the accident, when the transcript and audiotapes emerged, those words were taken out of context, and used to portray Ham as a villainous and almost inhumanly callous person, which she certainly was not. In fact, she was married to an astronaut, and was as concerned as anyone about the safety of the shuttle crews. This was a dangerous business, and she knew it all too well. But like her boss, Ron Dittemore, with whom she discussed the *Columbia* foam strike several times, she was so immersed in the closed world of shuttle management that she simply did not elevate the event—this "in-family" thing—to the level of concerns requiring action. She was intellectually arrogant, perhaps, and as a manager she failed abysmally. But neither she nor the others of her rank had the slightest suspicion that the *Columbia* might actually go down.

The frustration is that some people on lower levels were actively worried about that possibility, and they understood clearly that not enough was known about the effects of the foam strike on the wing, but they expressed their concerns mostly to one another, and for good reason, because on the few occasions when they tried to alert the decision-makers, NASA's management system overwhelmed them and allowed none of them to be heard. The question now, of course, is why.

The CAIB's search for answers began long before the technical details were resolved, and it ultimately involved hundreds of interviews and 50,000 pages of transcripts. The manner in which those interviews were conducted became a contentious issue, and it was arguably Gehman's biggest mistake. As a military man, advised by military men on the board, he decided to conduct the interviews according to a military model of safety probes, in which individual fault is not formally assigned, and the interviews themselves are "privileged," meaning forever sealed off from public view. It was understood that identities and deeds would *not* be protected from view, only individual testimonies to the CAIB, but serious critics cried foul nonetheless, and pointed out correctly that Gehman was using loopholes to escape sunshine laws that otherwise would have applied. Gehman believed that treating the testimony as privileged was necessary to encourage witnesses to talk, and to get to the bottom of the story, but the long-term effect of the investigation will be diminished as a result (for instance, by lack of access to the raw material by outside analysts), and there was widespread consensus among the experienced (largely civilian) investigators actually conducting

the interviews that the promise of privacy was having little effect on what people were willing to say. These were not criminals they were talking to, or careful lawyers. For the most part they were sincere engineering types who were concerned about what had gone wrong, and would have been willing even without privacy to speak their minds. The truth, in other words, would have come out even in the brightest of sunshine.

The story that emerged was a sad and unnecessary one, involving arrogance, insularity, and bad luck allowed to run unchecked. On the seventh day of the flight, January 22, just as the Air Force began to move on the Kennedy engineers' back-channel request for photographs, Linda Ham heard to her surprise that this approach (which according to front-channel procedures would have required her approval) had been made. She immediately telephoned other high-level managers in Houston to see if any of them wanted to issue a formal "requirement" for imagery, and when they informed her that they did not, rather than exploring the question with the Kennedy engineers she simply terminated their request with the Department of Defense. This appears to have been a purely bureaucratic reaction. A NASA liaison officer then e-mailed an apology to Air Force personnel, assuring them that the

would have been safe and easy to do. That e-mail, however, was never answered. This time the Debris Assessment engineers decided on a still simpler solution—to ask the Department of Defense to take some high-resolution pictures. Ignorant of the fact that the Kennedy group had already made such a request, and that it had just been peevishly canceled, they sent out two requests of their own, directed, appropriately, to Ron Dittmore and Linda Ham, but through channels that were a little off-center, and happened to fail. Those channels were ones they had used in their regular work as engineers, outside the formal shuttle-management structure. By unfortunate circumstance, the request that came closest to getting through was intercepted by a mid-level employee (the assistant to an intended recipient, who was on vacation) who responded by informing the Debris Assessment engineers, more or less correctly, that Linda Ham had decided against Air Force imagery.

The confusion was now total, yet also nearly invisible—and within the suppressive culture of the human space-flight program, it had very little chance of making itself known. At the top of the tangle, neither Ron Dittmore nor Linda Ham ever learned that the Debris Assessment Team wanted pictures; at the bottom, the Debris Assessment engineers heard the "no" without suspecting that it was not

Low-level engineers in Houston e-mailed a query to superiors about the possibility of getting the astronauts to take a spacewalk and inspect the wing. It turned out that this would have been safe and easy to do. That e-mail, however, was never answered.

shuttle was in "excellent shape," and explaining that a foam strike was "something that has happened before and is not considered to be a major problem." The officer continued, "The one problem that this has identified is the need for some additional coordination within NASA to assure that when a request is made it is done through the official channels." Months later one of the CAIB investigators who had followed this trail was still seething with anger at what had occurred. He said, "Because the problem was not identified in the traditional way—'Houston, we have a problem!'—well, then, 'Houston, we *don't* have a problem! Because *Houston* didn't *identify* the problem."

But another part of Houston was doing just that. Unbeknownst to Ham and the shuttle management, the low-level engineers of the Debris Assessment Team had concluded that the launch films were not clear enough to indicate where the foam had hit, and particularly whether it had hit the underside tile or a leading-edge RCC panel. Rather than trying to run their calculations in the blind, they had decided that they should do the simple thing and have someone take a look for damage. They had already e-mailed one query to the engineering department, about the possibility of getting the astronauts themselves to take a short spacewalk and inspect the wing. It later turned out that this

an answer to their request. They were told to go back to the Crater model and numerical analysis, and as earnest, hard-working engineers (hardly rebels, these), they dutifully complied, all the while regretting the blind assumptions that they would have to make. Given the obvious potential for a catastrophe, one might expect that they would have gone directly to Linda Ham, on foot if necessary, to make the argument in person for a spacewalk or high-resolution photos. However, such were the constraints within the Johnson Space Center that they never dared. They later said that had they made a fuss about the shuttle, they might have been singled out for ridicule. They feared for their standing, and their careers.

The CAIB investigator who asked the engineers what conclusion they had drawn at the time from management's refusal later said to me, "They all thought, 'Well, none of us have a security clearance high enough to view any of this imagery.' They talked about this openly among themselves, and they figured one of three things:

"One: The "no" means that management's already got photos, and the damage isn't too bad. They can't show us the photos, because we don't have the security clearance, and they can't *tell* us they have the photos, or *tell* us the damage isn't bad, because that tells us how accurate the

photos are—and we don't have the security clearance. But wait a minute, if that's the case, then what're we doing here? Why are we doing the analysis? So no, that can't be right.

"Okay, then, two: They already took the photos, and the damage is so severe that there's no hope for recovery. Well ... that can't be right either, because in that case, why are we doing the analysis?

"Okay, then, three: They took the photos. They can't tell us they took the photos, and the photos don't give us clear definition. So we need to do the analysis. That's gotta be it!"

What the Debris Assessment engineers could not imagine is that no photos had been taken, or ever would be—and essentially for lack of curiosity by NASA's imperious, self-convinced managers. What those managers in turn could not imagine was that people in their own house might really be concerned. The communication gap had nothing to do with security clearances, and it was complete.

Gehman explained the underlying realities to me. He said, "They claim that the culture in Houston is a 'badge-less society,' meaning it doesn't matter what you have on your badge—you're concerned about shuttle safety together. Well, that's all nice, but the truth is that it *does* matter what badge you're wearing. Look, if you really do have an organ-

According to him, she answered, "Well, when I hear about them ..."

He interrupted. "Linda, by their very nature you may not hear about them."

"Well, when somebody comes forward and tells me about them."

"But Linda, what techniques do you use to *get* them?"

He told me she had no answer.

This was certainly not the sort of risk-versus-risk decision-making that Michael Bloomfield had in mind when he described the thinking behind his own shuttle flights.

At 7:00 A.M. on the ninth day, January 24, which was one week before the *Columbia's* scheduled re-entry, the engineers from the Debris Assessment Team formally presented the results of their numerical analysis to Linda Ham's intermediary, Don McCormack. The room was so crowded with concerned observers that some people stood in the hall, peering in. The fundamental purpose of the meeting would have been better served had the engineers been able to project a photograph of a damaged wing onto the screen, but, tragically, that was not to be. Instead they projected a typically crude PowerPoint summary, based on the results from the Crater model, with which they at-

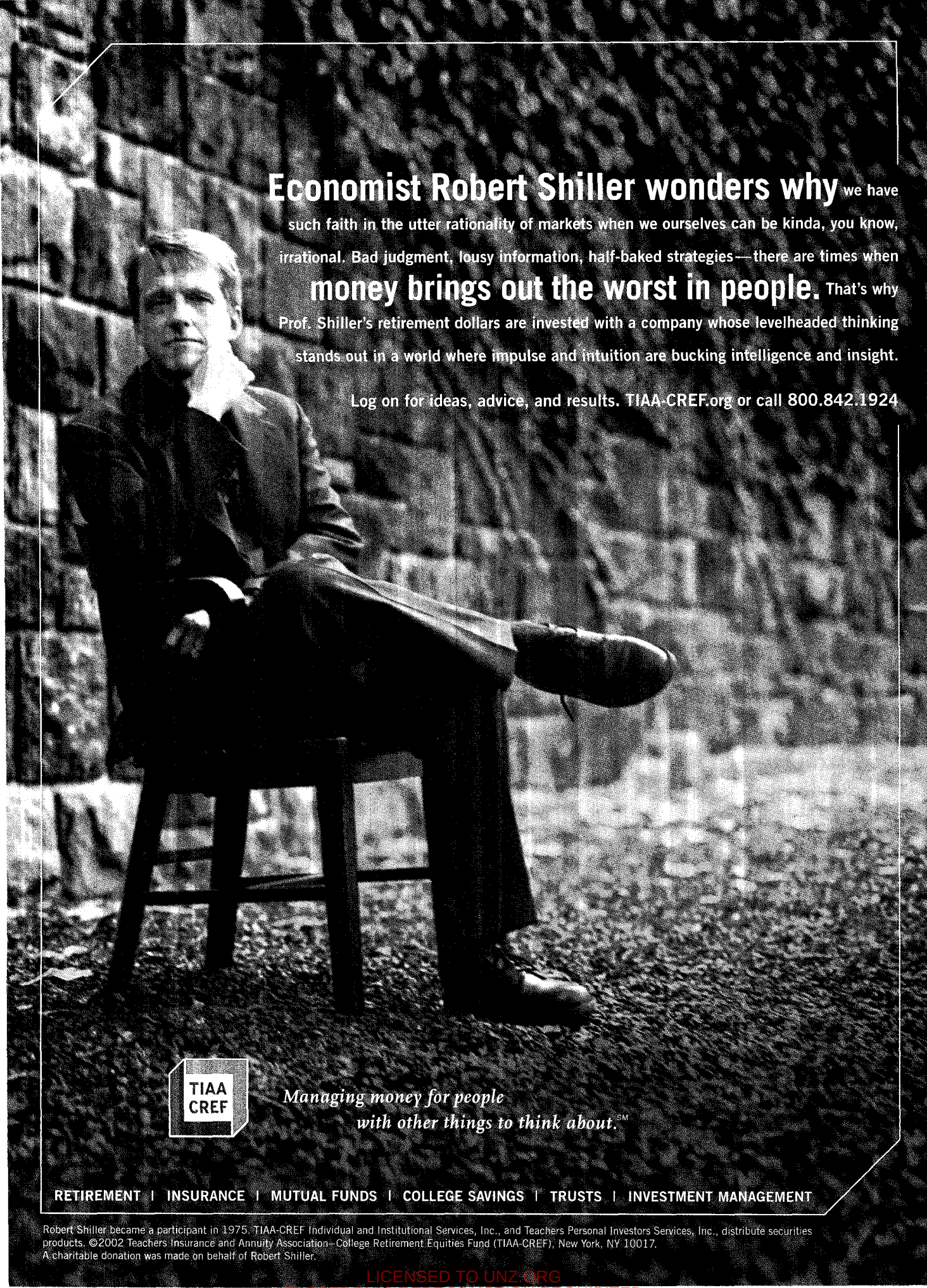
Linda Ham, known for a tough and domineering management style, came to embody NASA's arrogance and insularity. She responded to news of the foam strike as if it were just another item to be efficiently handled and then checked off the list.

ization that has free communication and open doors and all that kind of stuff, it takes a special kind of management to make it work. And we just don't see that management here. Oh, they *say* all the right things. 'We have open doors and e-mails, and anybody who sees a problem can raise his hand, blow a whistle, and stop the whole process.' But then when you look at how it really works, it's an incestuous, hierarchical system, with invisible rankings and a very strict informal chain of command. They all know that. So even though they've got all the trappings of communication, you don't actually *find* communication. It's very complex. But if a person brings an issue up, what caste he's in makes all the difference. Now, again, NASA will deny this, but if you talk to people, if you really listen to people, all the time you hear 'Well, I was afraid to speak up.' Boy, it comes across loud and clear. You listen to the meetings: 'Anybody got anything to say?' There are thirty people in the room, and *slam!* There's nothing. We have plenty of witness statements saying, 'If I had spoken up, it would have been at the cost of my job.' And if you're in the engineering department, you're a nobody."

One of the CAIB investigators told me that he asked Linda Ham, "As a manager, how do you seek out dissenting opinions?"

tempted to explain a nuanced position: first, that if the tile had been damaged, it had probably endured well enough to allow the *Columbia* to come home; and second, that for lack of information they had needed to make assumptions to reach that conclusion, and that troubling unknowns therefore limited the meaning of the results. The latter message seems to have been lost. Indeed, this particular PowerPoint presentation became a case study for Edward Tufte, the brilliant communications specialist from Yale, who in a subsequent booklet, *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint*, tore into it for its dampening effect on clear expression and thought. The CAIB later joined in, describing the widespread use of PowerPoint within NASA as one of the obstacles to internal communication, and criticizing the Debris Assessment presentation for mechanically underplaying the uncertainties that remained.

Had the uncertainties been more strongly expressed as the *central* factor in question, the need to inspect the wing by spacewalk or photograph might have become obvious even to the shuttle managers. Still, the Mission Management Team seemed unprepared to hear nuance. Fixated on potential tile damage as the relevant question, assuming without good evidence that the RCC panels were strong enough to withstand a foam strike, subtly skewing the



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discussion away from catastrophic burn-through and toward the potential effects on turnaround times on the ground and how that might affect the all-important launch schedule, the shuttle managers were convinced that they had the situation as they defined it firmly under control.

At a regularly scheduled MMT meeting later that morning McCormack summarized the PowerPoint presentation for Linda Ham. He said, "The analysis is not complete. There is one case yet that they wish to run, but kind of just jumping to the conclusion of all that, they do show that [there is], obviously, a potential for significant tile damage here, but thermal analysis does not indicate that there is potential for a burn-through. I mean, there could be localized heating damage. There is ... obviously there is a lot of uncertainty in all this in terms of the size of the debris and where it hit and the angle of incidence."

Ham answered, "No burn-through means no catastrophic damage. And the localized heating damage would mean a tile replacement?"

"Right, it would mean possible impacts to turnaround repairs and that sort of thing, but we do not see any kind of safety-of-flight issue here yet in anything that we've looked at."

This was all too accurate in itself. Ham said, "And no safety of flight, no issue for this mission, nothing that we're going to do different. There may be a turnaround [delay]."

McCormack said, "Right. It could potentially [have] hit the RCC ... We don't see any issue if it hit the RCC ..."

The discussion returned to the tiles. Ham consulted with a tile specialist named Calvin Schomburg, who for days had been energetically making a case independent of the Debris Assessment analysis that a damaged tile would endure re-entry—and thereby adding, unintentionally, to the distractions and false assumptions of the management team. After a brief exchange Ham cut off further discussion with a quick summary for some people participating in the meeting by conference call, who were having trouble hearing the speakerphone. She said, "So, no safety-of-flight kind of issue. It's more of a turnaround issue similar to what we've had on other flights. That's it? All right, any questions on that?"

And there were not.

For reasons unexplained, when the official minutes of the meeting were written up and distributed (having been signed off on by Ham), all mention of the foam strike was omitted. This was days before the *Columbia's* re-entry, and seems to indicate sheer lack of attention to this subject, rather than any sort of cover-up.

The truth is that Linda Ham was as much a victim of NASA as were *Columbia's* astronauts, who were still doing their science experiments then, and free-falling in splendor around the planet. Her predicament had roots that went way back, nearly to the time of Ham's birth, and it involved not only the culture of the human space-flight program but also the White House, Congress, and NASA leadership over

the past thirty years. Gehman understood this fully, and as the investigation drew to a close, he vowed to avoid merely going after the people who had been standing close to the accident when it occurred. The person standing closest was, of course, Linda Ham, and she will bear a burden for her mismanagement. But by the time spring turned to summer, and the CAIB moved its operation from Houston to Washington, D.C., Gehman had taken to saying, "Complex systems fail in complex ways," and he was determined that the CAIB's report would document the full range of NASA's mistakes. It did, and in clean, frank prose, using linked sentences and no PowerPoint displays.

As the report was released, on August 26, Mars came closer to Earth than it had in 60,000 years. Gehman told me that he continued to believe in the importance of America's human space-flight effort, and even of the return of the shuttle to flight—at least until a replacement with a clearer mission can be built and put into service. It was a quiet day in Washington, with Congress in recess and the President on vacation. Aides were coming from Capitol Hill to pick up several hundred copies of the report and begin planning hearings for the fall. The White House was receiving the report too, though keeping a cautious distance, as had been expected; it was said that the President might read an executive summary. Down in Houston, board members were handing copies to the astronauts, the managers, and the families of the dead.

Gehman was dressed in a suit, as he had been at the start of all this, seven months before. It was up to him now to drive over to NASA headquarters, in the southwest corner of the city, and deliver the report personally to Sean O'Keefe. I went along for the ride, as did the board member Sheila Widnall, who was there to lend Gehman some moral support. The car was driven by a Navy officer in whites. At no point since the accident had anyone at NASA stepped forward to accept personal responsibility for contributing to this accident—not Linda Ham, not Ron Dittmore, and certainly not Sean O'Keefe. However, the report in Gehman's hands (248 pages, full color, well bound) made responsibility very clear. This was not going to be a social visit. Indeed, it turned out to be extraordinarily tense. Gehman and Widnall strode up the carpeted hallways in a phalanx of anxious, dark-suited NASA staffers, who swung open the doors in advance and followed close on their heels. O'Keefe's office suite was practically imperial in its expense and splendor. High officials stood in small, nervous groups, murmuring. After a short delay O'Keefe appeared—a tall, balding, gray-haired man with stooped shoulders. He shook hands and ushered Gehman and Widnall into the privacy of his inner office. Ten minutes later they emerged. There was a short ceremony for NASA cameras, during which O'Keefe thanked Gehman for his important contribution, and then it was time to leave. As we drove away, I asked Gehman how it had been in there with O'Keefe.

He said "Stiff. Very stiff."

We talked about the future. The report had made a series of recommendations for getting the shuttle back into flight, and beyond that for beginning NASA's long and necessary process of reform. I knew that Gehman, along with much of the board, had volunteered to Congress to return in a year, to peer in deeply again, and to try to judge if progress had been made. I asked him how genuine he thought such progress could be, and he managed somehow to express hope, though skeptically.

By January 23, the *Columbia's* eighth day in orbit, the crew had solved a couple of minor system problems, and after a half day off, during which no doubt some of the astronauts took the opportunity for some global sightseeing, they were proceeding on schedule with their laboratory duties, and were in good spirits and health. They had been told nothing of the foam strike. Down in Houston, the flight controllers at Mission Control were aware of it, and they knew that the previous day Linda Ham had canceled the request for Air Force photographs. Confident that the issue would be satisfactorily resolved by the shuttle managers, they decided nonetheless to inform the flight crew by e-mail—if only because certain reporters at the

The e-mail's content honestly reflected what was believed on the ground, though in a repackaged and highly simplified form. There was no mention of the inadequate quality of the pictures, of the large size of the foam, of the ongoing analysis, or of Linda Ham's decision against Air Force imagery. This was typical for Mission Control communications, a small example of a long-standing pattern of something like information-hoarding that was instinctive and a matter as much of style as of intent: the astronauts had been told of the strike, but almost as if they were children who didn't need to be involved in the grown-up conversation. Two days later, when Rick Husband answered the e-mail, he wrote, "Thanks a million!" and "Thanks for the great work!" and after making a little joke, that "Main Wing" could sound like a Chinese name, he signed off with an e-mail smile—:). He made no mention of the foam strike at all. And with that, as we now know, the crew's last chance for survival faded away.

Linda Ham was wrong. Had the hole in the leading edge been seen, actions could have been taken to try to save the astronauts' lives. The first would have been simply to buy some time. Assuming a starting point on the fifth day of the flight, NASA engineers subsequently calculated that by requiring the crew to rest and sleep, the mission could

By the time it got to Texas, the *Columbia* had already proved itself a heroic flying machine, having endured for so long at hypersonic speeds with little left of the midsection of its left wing, and the plume of hot gas still in there, alive, eating it away.

Florida launch site had heard of it, and might ask questions at an upcoming press conference, a Public Affairs Office, or PAO, event. The e-mail was written by one of the lead flight controllers, in the standard, overly upbeat style. It was addressed to the pilots, Rick Husband and William McCool.

Under the subject line "INFO: Possible PAO Event Question," it read,

Rick and Willie,

You guys are doing a fantastic job staying on the timeline and accomplishing great science. Keep up the good work and let us know if there is anything that we can do better from an MCC/POCC standpoint.

There is one item that I would like to make you aware of for the upcoming PAO event ... This item is not even worth mentioning other than wanting to make sure that you are not surprised by it in a question from a reporter.

The e-mail then briefly explained what the launch pictures had shown—a hit from the bipod-ramp foam. A video clip was attached. The e-mail concluded,

Experts have reviewed the high speed photography and there is no concern for RCC or tile damage. We have seen this same phenomenon on several other flights and there is absolutely no concern for entry. That is all for now. It's a pleasure working with you every day.

have been extended to a full month, to February 15. During that time the *Atlantis*, which was already being prepared for a scheduled March 1 launch, could have been processed more quickly by ground crews working around the clock, and made ready to go by February 10. If all had proceeded perfectly, there would have been a five-day window in which to blast off, join up with the *Columbia*, and transfer the stranded astronauts one by one to safety, by means of tethered spacewalks. Such a rescue would not have been easy, and it would have involved the possibility of another fatal foam strike and the loss of two shuttles instead of one; but in the risk-versus-risk world of space flight, veterans like Mike Bloomfield would immediately have volunteered, and NASA would have bet the farm.

The fallback would have been a desperate measure—a jury-rigged repair performed by the *Columbia* astronauts themselves. It would have required two spacewalkers to fill the hole with a combination of heavy tools and metal scraps scavenged from the crew compartment, and to supplement that mass with an ice bag shaped to the wing's leading edge. In theory, if much of the payload had been jettisoned, and luck was with the crew, such a repair might perhaps have endured a modified re-entry and allowed the astronauts to bail out at the standard 30,000 feet. The engineers



*Columbia astronauts on
the flight deck during re-entry*

who came up with this plan realized that in reality it would have been extremely dangerous, and might well have led to a high-speed burn-through and the loss of the crew. But anything would have been better than attempting a normal re-entry as it was actually flown.

The blessing, if one can be found, is that the astronauts remained unaware until nearly the end. A home video shot on board and found in the wreckage documented the relaxed mood in the cockpit as the shuttle descended through the entry interface at 400,000 feet, at 7:44:09 Houston time, northwest of Hawaii. The astronauts were drinking water in anticipation of gravity's redistributive effect on their bodies. The *Columbia* was flying at the standard 40-degree nose-up angle, with its wings level, and still doing nearly 17,000 mph; outside, though the air was ultra-thin and dynamic pressures were very low, the aerodynamic surfaces were beginning to move in conjunction with the array of control jets, which were doing the main work of

maintaining the shuttle's attitude, and would throughout the re-entry. The astronauts commented like sightseers as sheets of fiery plasma began to pass by the windows.

The pilot, McCool, said, "Do you see it over my shoulder now, Laurel?"

Sitting behind him, the mission specialist Laurel Clark said, "I was filming. It doesn't show up nearly as much as the back."

McCool said to the Israeli payload specialist, Ilan Ramon, "It's going pretty good now. Ilan, it's really neat—it's a bright orange-yellow out over the nose, all around the nose."

The commander, Husband, said, "Wait until you start seeing the swirl patterns out your left or right windows."

McCool said, "Wow."

Husband said, "Looks like a blast furnace."

A few seconds later they began to feel gravity. Husband said, "Let's see here ... look at that."

McCool answered, "Yup, we're getting some Gs." As if it



NASA TV / GETTY IMAGES

were unusual, he said, "I let go of the card, and it falls." Their instruments showed that they were experiencing one hundredth of a G. McCool looked out the window again. He said, "This is amazing. It's really getting, uh, fairly bright out there."

Husband said, "Yup. Yeah, you definitely don't want to be outside now."

The flight engineer, Kalpana Chawla, answered sardonically, "What—like we did before?" The crew laughed.

Outside, the situation was worse than they imagined. Normally, as a shuttle streaks through the upper atmosphere it heats the air immediately around it to temperatures as high as 10,000°, but largely because of the boundary layer—a sort of air cushion created by the leading edges—the actual surface temperatures are significantly lower, generally around 3,000°, which the vehicle is designed to withstand, if barely. The hole in the *Columbia's* leading edge, however, had locally undermined the boundary

layer, and was now letting in a plume of superheated air that was cutting through insulation and working its way toward the inner recesses of the left wing. It is estimated that the plume may have been as hot as 8,000° near the RCC breach. The aluminum support structures inside the wing had a melting point of 1,200°, and they began to burn and give way.

The details of the left wing's failure are complex and technical, but the essentials are not difficult to understand. The wing was attacked by a snaking plume of hot gas, and eaten up from the inside. The consumption began when the shuttle was over the Pacific, and it grew worse over the United States. It included wire bundles leading from the sensors, which caused the data going into the MADS recorder and the telemetry going to Houston to fail in ways that only later made sense. At some point the plume blew right through the top of the left wing, and began to throw molten metal from the insides all over the aft rocket pods.

At some point it burned its way into the left main gear well, but it did not explode the tires.

As drag increased on the left wing, the autopilot and combined flight-control systems at first easily compensated for the resulting tendency to roll and yaw to the left. By external appearance, therefore, the shuttle was doing its normal thing, banking first to the right and then to the left for the scheduled energy-management turns, and tracking perfectly down the descent profile for Florida. The speeds were good, the altitudes were good, and all systems were functioning correctly. From within the cockpit the ride appeared to be right.

By the time it got to Texas the *Columbia* had already proved itself a heroic flying machine, having endured for so long at hypersonic speeds with little left of the midsection inside its left wing, and the plume of hot gas still in there, alive, and eating it away. By now, however, the flight-control systems were nearing their limits. The breakup was associated with that. At 7:59:15 Mission Control noticed the sudden loss of tire pressure on the left gear as the damage rapidly progressed. This was followed by Houston's call "And *Columbia*, Houston, we see your tire-pressure messages, and we did not copy your last call," and at 7:59:32 by *Columbia's* final transmission, "Roger, ah, buh ..."

The *Columbia* was traveling at 12,738 mph, at 200,000 feet, and the dynamic pressures were building, with the wings "feeling" the air at about 170 mph. Now, suddenly, the bottom surface of the left wing began to cave upward into the interior void of melted and burned-through bracing and structure. As the curvature of the wing changed, the lift increased, causing the *Columbia* to want to roll violently to the right; at the same time, because of an increase in asymmetrical drag, it yawed violently to the left. The control systems went to their limits to maintain order, and all four right yaw jets on the tail fired simultaneously, but to no avail. At 8:00:19 the *Columbia* rolled over the top and went out of control.

The gyrations it followed were complex combinations of roll, yaw, and pitch, and looked something like an oscillating flat spin. They seem to have resulted in the vehicle's flying backwards. At one point the autopilot appears to have been switched off and then switched on again, as if Husband, an experienced test pilot, was trying to sort things out. The breakup lasted more than a minute. Not surprisingly, the left wing separated first. Afterward the tail, the right wing, and the main body came apart in what investigators later called a controlled sequence "right down the track." As had happened with the *Challenger* in 1986, the crew cabin broke off intact. It assumed a stable flying position, apparently nose high, and later disintegrated like a falling star across the East Texas sky. ▀

William Langewiesche is a national correspondent for The Atlantic and a former professional pilot. His Atlantic cover story "The Crash of EgyptAir 990" won the 2002 National Magazine Award for Reporting. His most recent books include Inside the Sky (1998) and American Ground: Unbuilding the World Trade Center (2002).

NATURAL SETTINGS

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PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

The fin is the finest thing of its kind.
 The wing's a wonder the world over.
 The tongue is a form of eternal flame.
 The stone's a story that never grows old.

O fin, it's certain you want for nothing.
 Yo wing, you're everything we've ever dreamed.
 You said it, tongue: of arms and men you sing.
 Here's looking at you, stone: a star is born.

Who doesn't burn for a soul on the wing?
 Where is the man that can fine-tune the fin?
 When shall we learn to read the mind of the stone?
 What in the world holds its own like the tongue?

Stone says fin's the one that schooled the wing.
 Story goes one singer could charm the stones.
 Rock, paper, scissors: worlds without end.
 One slip of the tongue makes the whole world kin.

All together now: the many in the one.
 Brush fire of fins shirring the fathoms,
 Cairns of lost tongues, the chorus in the wings
 Riffing on the omens of the heavens.

Soul knows it can't live on breath alone.
 When the tongue wags the dog, the fur's gonna fly.
 The stone is a kind of recording angel.
 The wing's got the beat. The fin makes waves.

Wing it, mother tongue: the world's your whetstone.
 We're wired for sound. We're unfinished business.
 Let's hear it for the phoenix, all fired up.
 Sirens, rock us to sleep with the fishes.

Let's hear it for descent with variations.
 Let him without fin go back to the grindstone.
 The bat is the manta ray's soul brother.
 The dolphin's glossolalia speaks volumes.

Hosannas for sea changes, the wish made flesh.
 As the silkworm turns, as the chrysalis
 Is my witness, leviathan's no fluke.
 Blood from a stone is a thing to behold.

Blow me down with a feather, fishers of men;
 Rock of ages, take me under your wing.
 Muse, make it new: leave no tongue untuned.
 Rock my world, winged gods: begin again.

—DAVID BARBER

JOURNEY

In need of a journey,
 I traveled all the way from the rose
 to the potato
 and kept going.
 The mud was unbearable,
 the wind a knife.
 Not one bite to eat, not even
 a cup of tea-stained water,
 but at last I was on my way,
 alive and alone.

In flat country, I dozed off.
 When I awoke, a city
 was rising from the grain
 with its own onion-yellow moon.

It was then I remembered
 feeding apples to horses in autumn,
 how the horses tossed their heads back
 to tumble the fruit against
 their tilted teeth as they ground
 the apples down.
 Sprays of pink foam
 flew from their mouths
 and landed on me like garlands.

The sweet joy of slobber
 is one I had forgotten,
 and the joy of being nuzzled
 by huge animals begging for more,
 all their impatience
 in their lips.

—ERICA FUNKHOUSER

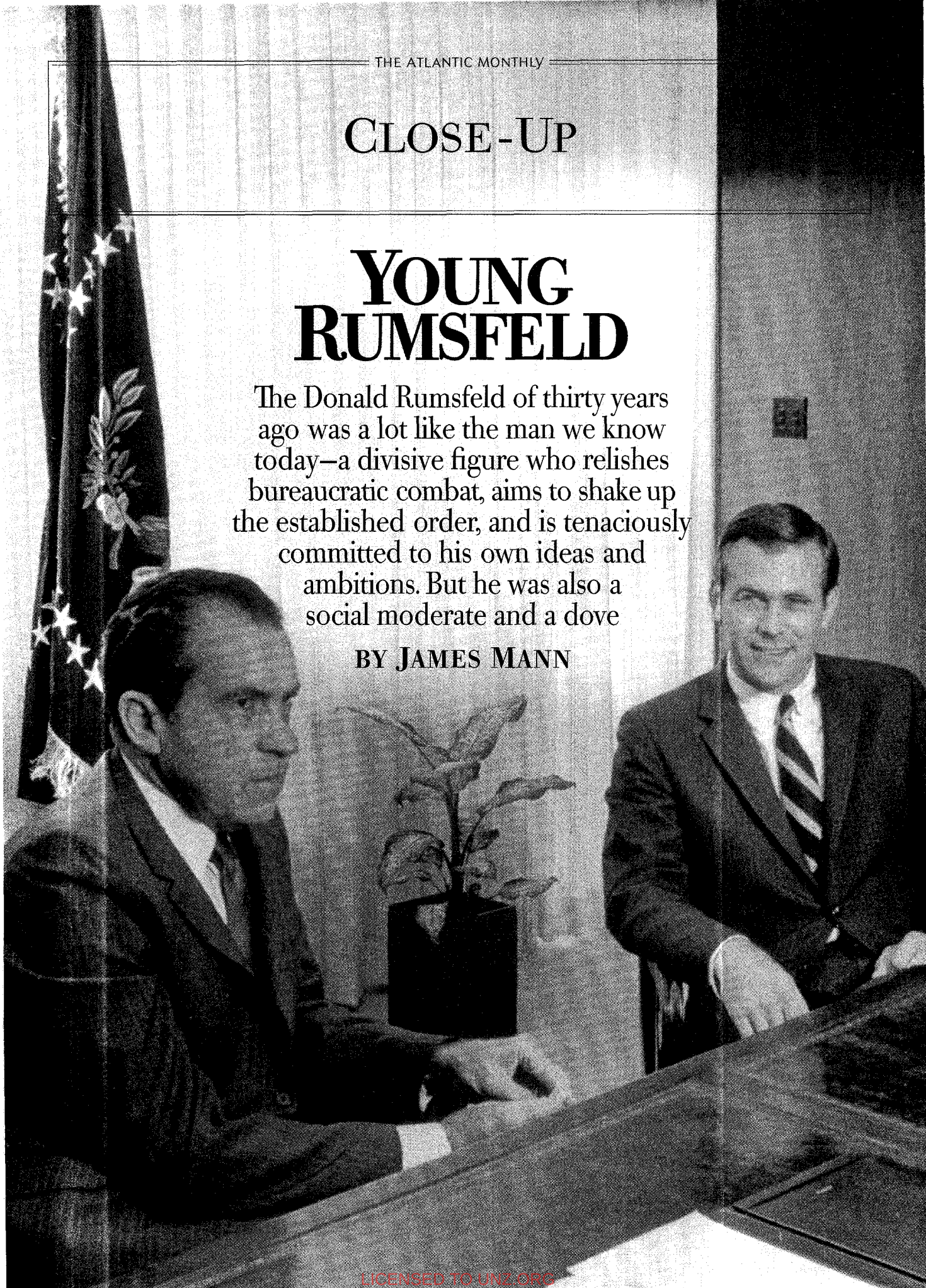
David Barber is a staff editor of The Atlantic and the author of The Spirit Level (1995). Erica Funkhouser's most recent collection of poems is Pursuit (2002). She teaches at MIT.

CLOSE-UP

YOUNG RUMSFELD

The Donald Rumsfeld of thirty years ago was a lot like the man we know today—a divisive figure who relishes bureaucratic combat, aims to shake up the established order, and is tenaciously committed to his own ideas and ambitions. But he was also a social moderate and a dove

BY JAMES MANN



YOUNG RUMSFELD

BY JAMES MANN

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During the midday hours of Wednesday, April 7, 1971, Richard Nixon was sitting in his office hide-away in the Executive Office Building, next door to the White House, attempting to prepare himself for that night's prime-time presidential address to the nation. The subject, as usual, was Vietnam. And yet as Nixon went over the speech with his two top aides—Henry Kissinger, the National Security Adviser, and H. R. ("Bob") Haldeman, Nixon's chief of staff—the conversation kept returning to a different topic: namely, what the President, with growing irritation, called "the Rumsfeld problem." Nixon was thinking of getting rid of Donald H. Rumsfeld, a former congressman who was then serving on the White House domestic-policy staff. "I think Rumsfeld may be not too long for this world," he said, adding, a few minutes later, "Let's dump him."

The problem was that from Nixon and Kissinger's perspective, Rumsfeld was becoming a troublesome antiwar advocate. Rumsfeld had emerged at the center of a small group of Administration officials, all of them involved with domestic policy, who were asking in staff meetings why the Administration could not move more quickly to end the war. The internal opponents also included George Shultz, the director of the Office of Management and Budget; Clark MacGregor, the counselor for congressional relations; and John Ehrlichman, the special assistant to the President for domestic affairs.

"They don't know a god-damn thing about foreign policy!" Nixon had said to Kissinger on the telephone a day earlier. "They're only concerned about, frankly, peace at any price, really. Because all they're concerned with is, well, revenue-sharing and the environment and all that crap—which doesn't amount to anything, in my opinion." Kissinger had concurred, saying, "They don't know what we'll be hit with if this whole thing comes apart."

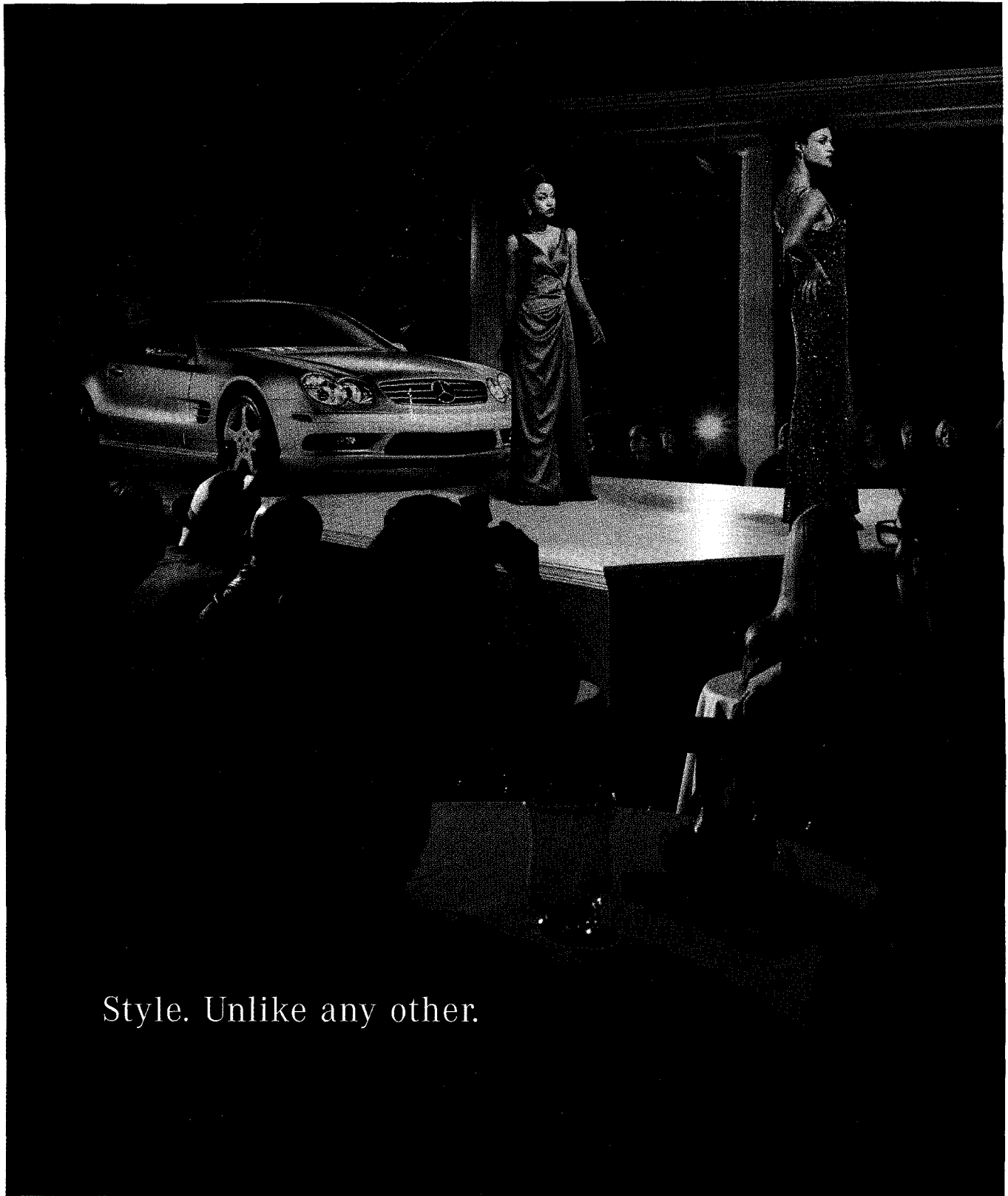
The Vietnam War had reached a new milestone the previous week: it had now claimed more American lives than the Korean War. Vietnam had thus become the fourth most lethal conflict in American history, after the Civil War and the two world wars. At home it was creating ever greater upheaval on college campuses, in the streets of major cities, and in American politics. That spring a new round of antiwar protests was building. The Democratic senator Edmund Muskie was gearing up to run against Nixon in 1972 and was challenging him on the war; polls showed that he was even with or ahead of the President. Even Republicans in Congress were becoming restive; earlier in the month nine Republican senators had met with Defense

Secretary Melvin Laird at the home of Senator Jacob Javits, of New York, to plead for an end to the war.

For nearly two months Rumsfeld had been seeking some new role in the Administration in which he could influence policy on Vietnam. In the process he had become a particular annoyance to Kissinger. Rumsfeld's first attempt—in a memo to Nixon dated February 27, 1971—was to propose the appointment of a special presidential envoy "to review and report on postwar Southeast Asia during the winding down of hostilities." The detailed memo left no doubt that Rumsfeld had himself in mind for this job. The special envoy could lay the groundwork for the postwar reconstruction of Southeast Asia, Rumsfeld argued; and he insisted that such an envoy would not intrude on Kissinger's turf as National Security Adviser. Rumsfeld told Nixon that making such an appointment "would focus attention and emphasis on Indo-China *peace* instead of Indo-China war." He was asking Nixon, in bureaucratic language, to give peace a chance.

Henry Kissinger was not about to yield any authority over Vietnam policy to this pushy politician. Kissinger's deputy, Alexander Haig, first postponed any response to Rumsfeld's Nixon memo for weeks, and then sent a reply saying that introducing a special envoy "would confuse our allies as to who was doing what." Undaunted, Rumsfeld broached the idea again in a one-on-one Oval Office meeting with Nixon. The President brushed him off and suggested instead that Rumsfeld broaden his foreign-policy experience with a brief mission overseas. "It might be better from your standpoint—I think you want to take a trip to Europe," he told Rumsfeld. The trip, ostensibly for the purpose of exchanging ideas with European officials about drug abuse, was scheduled for later that spring.

But Rumsfeld did not let go of Vietnam. On the morning of April 7 he pressed Kissinger, in the presence of other White House staff members, for an explanation of why the Administration couldn't move more quickly to bring the war to a close. Afterward Kissinger grumbled to the President that Rumsfeld had never quite said exactly what he wanted Nixon to do. He had never called specifically for Nixon to set a "date certain" for the end of the war (as Nixon's critics were requesting), and had spoken only vaguely of setting a date by which the United States would reduce its presence in Vietnam to a "residual force." It was this challenge at the staff meeting, and Rumsfeld's stance on Vietnam, that prompted Nixon to talk about firing him. The President also worried that Rumsfeld might quit first.



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"He's ready to jump the ship," Nixon said at his later meeting with Haldeman and Kissinger.

"No, I don't think he's ready to jump," Haldeman replied. "And I doubt if he ever would, just because [staying on in the Administration] serves his interests more than not. But I don't think he's ever going to be a solid member of the ship." "He's just positioning himself to be close to *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*," Kissinger interjected.

Nixon returned to business. "Well, then let's dump him right after this," he said. "Good God, we're sending him and [the White House adviser Robert] Finch on a two-month holiday to Europe. Shit. For what purpose?"

"To get him out of town," Kissinger said, gently reminding his boss that Rumsfeld's "holiday" in Europe had originally been their idea.

Nixon tried to go back to rehearsing that night's speech, in which he would announce that he planned to withdraw 100,000 Americans from Vietnam by the end of the year, but would also explicitly refuse to set a date for the end of the war. Still, he couldn't put Rumsfeld out of his mind.

"Coming back to the Rumsfeld problem—I'm disappointed in Don, Bob," he told Haldeman a few minutes later. "Understand, I don't want to be disappointed, just because—I don't want somebody who's just with us, God

be viewed as an ardent hawk, a champion of U.S. military power. That perception does not fit the early phases of his career, when, as a fervent proponent of domestic reform, he was a moderate-to-liberal force within the Nixon Administration. His dovish views suited his political ambitions: the war was unpopular, and as an adviser on domestic policy, he had no personal or professional stake in winning it. Indeed, Rumsfeld, who throughout his government career has seemed to relish bureaucratic combat, may have viewed Vietnam as an issue on which he could challenge Kissinger's primacy within the government (something he later did with greater success in his more hawkish guise during the Ford Administration).

Over the years another assumption about Rumsfeld has taken hold: that he had no connection to the seamier side of Nixon's presidency—the bare-knuckle apparatus that waged combat with Nixon's political enemies. This assumption arose in part from the fact that Rumsfeld was appointed the ambassador to NATO and was thus thousands of miles away, in Europe, during 1973–1974, when the Watergate scandal crested and Nixon resigned. Gerald Ford, an old friend, who brought Rumsfeld back to Washington to take charge of the White House staff after Nixon's resignation, helped to foster this perception. "He wouldn't tolerate

Over the years an assumption about Rumsfeld has taken hold: that he had no connection to the seamier side of Nixon's presidency. Nixon's secret White House tape recordings reveal a more complex reality, however.

damn it, when things are going good, you know what I mean? If he thinks we're going down the tubes, and he's just going to ride with us, maybe he's going to take a trip to Europe occasionally—then screw him, you know?"

What galled Nixon especially was that Rumsfeld, who was viewed as one of the Administration's most effective public speakers, refused to go out and defend the Nixon Administration to the American people. "He won't step up to anything," Nixon grumbled. "We have given him, time and time again, opportunities to step up, and he will not step up and kick the ball."

Haldeman agreed. "I used to think at one point he was a potential presidential contender, but he isn't," he said.

"He's like Finch," Nixon said. "They both have the charisma for national office, but neither has got the backbone."

Rumsfeld was one of several aides Nixon talked about dumping but never did. The President's irritation with him eventually subsided, and he remained in the Administration until its premature end. The Vietnam episode provides an illuminating glimpse of his work in the Nixon Administration and contradicts some of the simplistic perceptions Americans have since had of Rumsfeld.

During the following three decades Rumsfeld came to

political shenanigans," Ford wrote in his memoirs, "and the men around Nixon knew he wouldn't, so to protect themselves, they kept him out of the loop."

Nixon's secret White House tape recordings reveal a more complex reality, however. Rumsfeld was not entirely divorced from Nixon's political operations. There is no sign that he was involved in any of the illegalities of Watergate, but he was willing to offer Nixon other help of a not particularly exalted nature—some dirt on political enemies, some covert ties with a prominent pollster. The Nixon tapes reveal that Rumsfeld often worked with and was a special favorite of John Mitchell and Charles Colson, Nixon's roughest political operators, who viewed Rumsfeld as savvier than other White House aides. Indeed, when Nixon first considered naming Rumsfeld the NATO ambassador, in the summer of 1971, Mitchell urged the President to keep him around until after the election, and Nixon decided Mitchell was right. "Let me say this—he has done some good political stuff for Mitchell," Nixon told Haldeman about Rumsfeld at one point. "He'll cooperate. NATO's fine, but it pulls him out of politics ... He's an operator." In short, the tapes demonstrate that Rumsfeld was not nearly so marginal a figure in Nixon's political apparatus as he was later portrayed.

Nixon and Rumsfeld seem to have formed a curious but

strong bond early on. Rumsfeld saw Nixon as a mentor. In a series of lengthy one-on-one conversations in the White House, Rumsfeld repeatedly sought both to advance to a Cabinet job and to obtain Nixon's advice on his political career. Rumsfeld was, of course, gaining private tutelage from America's most skilled political infighter.

Nixon valued Rumsfeld too. From his perspective, Rumsfeld stood in a different category from Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and Kissinger: as a former congressman, Rumsfeld was the only senior White House staff member who had repeatedly subjected himself, as Nixon had, to the hazards and potential public humiliations of running for elective office. Nixon's political defeats in 1960 and 1962 and his long, acrimony-filled career had left the President with not only a strain of self-pity but also a strong sense

Donald Henry Rumsfeld's father, a Chicago real-estate broker, had moved his family around the country during a stint in the Navy in World War II and then returned to settle on Chicago's North Shore. Donald went to New Trier High School, where he was the star of the school's state-championship wrestling team. He went on to Princeton, where he became the captain of the wrestling team. One teammate, two years ahead of him, was Frank Carlucci, who would, like Rumsfeld, rise to the top of America's national-security establishment.

After college Rumsfeld spent three years in the Navy, where he became a pilot and a flight instructor and, yet again, a wrestling champion. According to Steve Neal, a *Chicago Tribune* reporter who chronicled Rumsfeld's early years, Rumsfeld hoped for a chance at the 1956 Olympics,



Nixon, his Cabinet, and other top officials, November 5, 1969

of personal identification with other politicians. Haldeman and Ehrlichman loathed Rumsfeld for his ambition and his self-promotion, but for Nixon these qualities did not count against Rumsfeld. Moreover, Nixon thought Rumsfeld was a good public face for the Administration and hoped to make use of him, especially to court voters on college campuses and in America's suburbs. "He's young, he's thirty-nine years old, he's a hell of a spokesman," Nixon said.

And yet their relationship remained largely private. In public Rumsfeld never seemed to be a central part of the Nixon Administration. Nixon discovered, to his frustration, that Rumsfeld was often too willing to challenge existing policy inside the White House and not willing enough to defend it in public. For Rumsfeld's part, he never managed to obtain the central role or the Cabinet appointment he wanted. As things turned out after Watergate, Rumsfeld was fortunate that he had never been closely identified with Nixon.

but gave up because of a shoulder injury. In the late 1950s he worked as a congressional aide in Washington. Eventually he decided to run for Congress himself. He entered the 1962 Republican primary for a congressional seat from Chicago's northern suburbs, a heavily Republican district. His main rival was an Evanston insurance executive whose company had been under state investigation. According to Neal, one of Rumsfeld's campaign aides—the young Republican Jeb Stuart Magruder, who was later convicted of perjury in the Watergate scandal—made sure that Rumsfeld's rival was asked repeatedly about the investigation. Rumsfeld won the primary and captured the seat.

In Congress, Rumsfeld first began to reveal the distinctive style that would mark his career for decades. Fellow congressmen found that he hated clichés and enjoyed embarrassing in public those who lapsed into jargon-filled speech. He served on the House Committee on Science and

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Astronautics, and took a special interest in the space program; once, an official of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration began telling members of the committee how NASA would do this project “in-house” and that project “in-house” and another project “in-house.” Exasperated, Rumsfeld finally interjected, “What about the out-house?”

Rumsfeld’s voting record was not unlike those of other Republicans from the northern suburbs: he was economically conservative but socially moderate; he supported civil-rights legislation; he was a leader in the drive to replace the draft with a volunteer Army. (Four decades later, after he became George W. Bush’s Secretary of Defense, two members of Congress who were opposed to military action against Iraq introduced legislation to reinstate the draft. Rumsfeld, drawing on his arguments from the 1960s, said that draftees had added “no value, no advantage, really” to the armed services. He was quickly obliged to apologize to veterans’ groups.)

Rumsfeld also took a modest interest in foreign policy.



In 1962 Richard Allen, the conservative Republican who later became Ronald Reagan’s National Security Ad-

viser, helped to set up the Center for Strategic Studies, a think tank at Georgetown University. Rumsfeld was one of the center’s earliest congressional allies. “We organized a little salon at night back when the members of Congress still had time to think and breathe,” Allen says. “Rumsfeld would come over along with a little coterie of Republican and Democratic congressmen. And Rumsfeld and I formed a friendship. We didn’t have any money; we drove Volkswagens and went to each other’s houses and drank jug wine and ate spaghetti.”

Rumsfeld’s main achievement during this period was his role in a successful challenge to the existing political order on Capitol Hill. Following Barry Goldwater’s humiliating defeat in the 1964 presidential election, some Republicans in the House of Representatives decided to push for new party leadership. The Republican minority leader at the time was Charles Halleck, of Indiana. Rumsfeld emerged at the head of this group of insurgents, which included Representatives Charles Goodell, of New York; Robert Griffin, of Michigan; Albert Quie, of Minnesota; and Robert Ellsworth, of Kansas. The group moved to dump Halleck and replace him with Gerald Ford, of Michigan. The effort succeed-

ed, and Rumsfeld became one of Ford’s closest advisers.

For a generally conservative Republican congressman, Rumsfeld maintained some surprising friendships with Democrats. One of his closest associates in the House was Allard K. Lowenstein, a leader of the antiwar movement and perhaps the most liberal member of Congress at the time, who in 1967 led the fight within the Democratic Party to drop Lyndon Johnson as its presidential nominee. Rumsfeld and Lowenstein had served together as congressional aides in the late 1950s and once dreamed of buying a country newspaper.

During the 1968 campaign Rumsfeld performed one noteworthy bit of service for the presidential nominee Richard Nixon. Knowing that Rumsfeld came from Chicago, Nixon had asked him to help run a small Republican operation inside the Conrad Hilton Hotel during the Democratic National Convention there, in August. The twenty-eight-story Hilton was serving as the headquarters for Vice President Hubert Humphrey, the leading Democrat, and for Eugene McCarthy, the antiwar candidate; many Democratic delegates were staying there too. Working with several other Nixon supporters, Rumsfeld was supposed to serve as a spokesman for the Republican nominee, providing reporters

Nixon’s top aides disliked and resented Rumsfeld. “The senior staff grew to realize that the ambitious Rumsfeld would decline every assignment that did not enhance his personal goals,” John Ehrlichman later wrote.

with on-the-spot responses to Democratic accusations. In addition, Nixon, a lifelong voracious consumer of political intelligence, asked Rumsfeld to report back on what he saw and heard that week, both from the participants at the convention and from the protesters expected outside it. When violence erupted, Rumsfeld served as Nixon’s lookout man.

In the afternoon and evening hours of August 28 the Chicago police chased antiwar demonstrators through downtown streets and attacked them with nightsticks. Some of the worst beatings took place along Michigan Avenue, directly in front of the Hilton. As he watched the bloodshed from his hotel window, Rumsfeld provided an account for Nixon and his aides, who were relaxing in Key Biscayne and preparing for his fall campaign.

“He would call up and say, ‘They’re breaking bones! Omigosh, look at that!’” recalls Robert Ellsworth, Nixon’s national political director, who took Rumsfeld’s calls from Chicago. “The information wasn’t that politically useful, but it was titillating to the candidate. Nixon loved those details.”

By 1968 Rumsfeld had been serving in Congress for nearly six years. He was ready for a change. After campaigning for Nixon throughout the country that fall, he hoped to be named chairman of the Republican National Committee if Nixon won the election. He didn’t get the job. As would hap-

pen on other occasions throughout his career, Rumsfeld's driving, combative style had pleased the top man but had earned him powerful enemies among others near the top, particularly Haldeman. According to Ellsworth, Haldeman blocked Rumsfeld both from the party chairmanship (which eventually went to a more easygoing congressman, Rogers Morton) and from various top jobs in the Administration. Rumsfeld then sought to become head of the party's Research and Planning Committee but lost out on that post, too—to Representative Robert A. Taft Jr., of Ohio. In the process of leading the movement for Ford, Rumsfeld had antagonized some other party leaders in the House. By the early months of 1969 he seemed to be stuck, an up-and-coming congressman looking for the next rung to climb.

Three months after Nixon's inauguration a job finally opened up. Two Republican governors had turned down Nixon's invitations to head the Office of Economic Opportunity, an agency established during the Johnson Administration to run new programs aimed at eliminating poverty. Nixon offered the job to Rumsfeld, who had voted in Congress against many of those programs. The job "was less than what he wanted, but more than Haldeman wanted him to get," Ellsworth says.

Before taking the job Rumsfeld bargained hard. At a meeting with Nixon in Key Biscayne, he won assurances that he would be named not only head of the anti-poverty agency but also an assistant to the President, with Cabinet-level status and an office in the White House. The concurrent White House appointment turned out to be important, because it helped to overcome a legal obstacle: the Constitution bars a member of Congress from accepting any job in the federal government if the salary for that job has been increased during the congressman's time in office. While Rumsfeld was in Congress, the salary of the OEO director had been increased from \$30,000 to \$42,500. However, the Nixon Administration obtained a memorandum from its bright new assistant attorney general, William H. Rehnquist, explaining that the constitutional problem could be circumvented if Nixon agreed to pay Rumsfeld no salary for his work as the OEO director and \$42,500 for his work as a White House adviser. Thus Rumsfeld got his first job in the Nixon Administration partly through the convoluted legal reasoning of the future Chief Justice of the United States.

One of Rumsfeld's first actions in the Administration was a seemingly minor personnel decision whose impact would reverberate for decades. Rumsfeld was looking for a right-hand man. He found and hired a twenty-eight-year-old Capitol Hill staff aide and graduate student named Richard Cheney.

Cheney grew up in Casper, Wyoming, the son of a career civil servant with the Department of Agriculture. He was a football star and a class president at Natrona County High School, where he dated the state-champion baton twirler, Lynne Vincent. He won a rare scholarship to Yale University, but dropped out within two years. "I didn't relate to Yale at all," he later explained. "I had some romantic notions about wanting to get out and see the world—or at least traveling all around the West."

Cheney moved back west to be what he later called a "lineman for the county," building power lines on construction crews in Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah. Eventually he returned to college, at the University of Wyoming; married Lynne Vincent; and went off with her to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin, where he became a doctoral candidate in political science and she became a doctoral candidate in English. He was eligible for the draft during the



Rumsfeld and his deputy, Richard Cheney, November 7, 1975

Opposite: Congressman Rumsfeld, of Illinois, January 17, 1963

Vietnam War but obtained deferments, first as a student and then as a parent, after his and Lynne's first daughter, Elizabeth, was born, in 1966. (More than two decades later, when he was questioned by the Senate Armed Services Committee about those draft deferments, Cheney offered a memorable reply: "I had other priorities in the sixties than military service." He said he would have been happy to serve if he had been called, and that he felt the U.S. involvement in Vietnam was a noble cause.)

Cheney went to Washington in 1968, on a fellowship from the American Political Science Association that enabled him to work for a member of Congress. One of the congressmen with whom he interviewed for a job was Rumsfeld—but the future Vice President failed to impress the future Defense Secretary. The applicant was neither particularly eloquent nor dynamic. "It was one of the more unpleasant experiences of my life," Cheney recalled in a 1986 speech. "The truth is, I

flunked the interview. After half an hour it was clear to both of us that there was no possibility that I could work for him.”

Cheney landed in the office of William Steiger, of Wisconsin. He was working there in the spring of 1969 when he noticed a note on Steiger’s desk from Rumsfeld, looking for advice and help in his new OEO job. Cheney spotted an opportunity. Over a weekend he wrote an unsolicited memo for Steiger on how to staff and run a federal agency. The following week Steiger passed the memo on to Rumsfeld. A few weeks after reading it Rumsfeld called Cheney and offered him a position as his special assistant.

It was the beginning of Cheney’s long apprenticeship with Rumsfeld. Over most of the next seven years in the Nixon and Ford Administrations, Cheney served as Rumsfeld’s doorkeeper and top administrator in Washington. He proved to be quiet, discreet, and efficient. Those working for Rumsfeld soon discovered that the way to get things done was to go to Cheney. Rumsfeld’s style was to run day-to-day operations by remote control, issuing edicts and obtaining information through his special assistant. As that assistant, Cheney gradually took on an importance of his own. “When you gave something to Dick,” one OEO veteran recalls, “it happened. It got done.”

They were a complementary pair, each offering traits

enough, during the Nixon Administration three of America’s future Secretaries of Defense—Rumsfeld, Carlucci, and Cheney—were working alongside one another in an agency dedicated to social change. The OEO’s employees in the late 1960s and early 1970s also included Bill Bradley, the future senator and presidential candidate; Christine Todd Whitman, the future governor of New Jersey and EPA administrator; Mickey Kantor, the future U.S. trade representative; Jim Leach, the future congressman; and Terry Lenzner, the future investigator and staff member for the Senate Watergate Committee. John D. Rockefeller IV was one of the earliest recruits of Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), the OEO program that served as a domestic version of the Peace Corps; VISTA assigned Rockefeller to West Virginia, where he later settled down and was elected first governor and then U.S. senator.

Many of these people had been attracted by the idealism of the agency’s mission. When Lyndon Johnson established the OEO, in 1964, he told Congress, “For the first time in our history, it is possible to conquer poverty.” In addition to VISTA the agency had in its early years started up the Job Corps, for disadvantaged youth; legal services for the poor; and Head Start, the education program for preschool children.

In the OEO’s first three years, under the Democrats, as

One of Rumsfeld’s first actions in the Nixon Administration was to hire a young aide named Richard Cheney. So began a long apprenticeship. Those working for Rumsfeld discovered that the way to get things done was to go to Cheney.

the other didn’t have. Rumsfeld was full of energy; Cheney was low-key. Rumsfeld overflowed with words and ideas; Cheney, the laconic westerner, never used a word beyond what the situation required. Rumsfeld always seemed to want more: more turf, expanded missions, a bigger job. Cheney appeared to the world as unfailingly modest and patient. Rumsfeld challenged people head on, and in the process made many others nervous or resentful. The self-effacing Cheney, in contrast, usually managed to leave adversaries thinking that whatever had happened to them was merely the business of government and nothing personal. Rumsfeld loved to shake up the established order; Cheney conveyed an air of reassurance and stability.

Yet despite their contrasting styles, the two men tended to think alike. They would work together, on and off, over more than three decades without any strong differences of opinion emerging between them.

Cheney was merely one of several future leaders working at the OEO in those years, at a time when the eradication of poverty was given much higher priority than it would be later on. Rumsfeld also recruited Frank Carlucci, his friend and wrestling teammate from Princeton, to serve as one of his top aides. Thus, curiously

its personnel began to organize and speak up for the poor, the agency aroused intense opposition from governors, local officials, and the business community. The strongest opposition arose when lawyers for the anti-poverty program in California helped to represent migrant farm workers in disputes against agricultural interests, and Governor Ronald Reagan in response tried to cut off OEO funding for the legal-aid program.

During the 1968 campaign Nixon had promised to bring the OEO to heel. According to Leonard Garment, Nixon’s White House counselor and former law partner, Nixon’s main objective for the agency was “getting control of all the *meshugenehs* who were driving governors and other people crazy.”

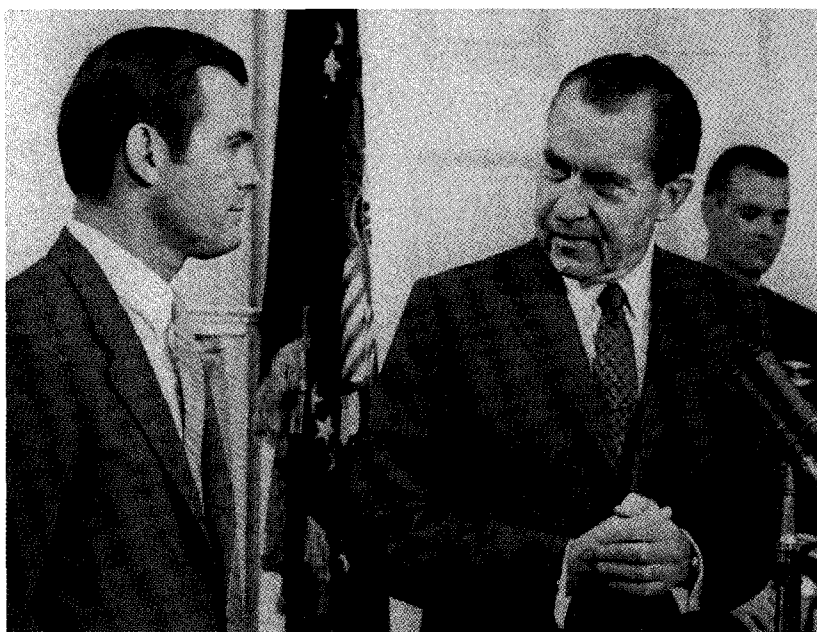
Thus Rumsfeld was stepping into a potentially poisonous situation—taking over an agency that had been created by the Democrats and was filled with enthusiastic young employees but was despised by the President for whom he worked. He quickly moved to curb some of the OEO’s excesses.

Nevertheless, within a few months Rumsfeld became a staunch and surprisingly tough advocate for the anti-poverty agency. This was his first job in the executive branch, and from the very start he demonstrated a particular talent for defending his bureaucratic turf. To get what his

organization needed he quietly pushed the White House and the budget officers, and he also learned to go outside the Administration, to Congress and the press, to counter resistance from within the Administration. He was trying to do his best for the agency, hoping to make it succeed.

In a speech to the National Press Club seven months after taking charge of the OEO, Rumsfeld even defended the concept of federally funded legal services, saying that “justice for the poor” was part of his agency’s mission. By this point he was beginning to be seen as a rare moderate, even progressive, voice within the Administration, and was becoming a target of the conservatives. At the press conference that followed this speech, the very first questioner asked Rumsfeld about reports that he was viewed “with open hostility” in the Nixon White House.

The following year Rumsfeld sponsored a notable ini-



Nixon announces Rumsfeld's appointment as OEO director, April 21, 1969

tiative that would eventually become a cherished cause of American conservatives: tuition tax credits. It was the first salvo in an education controversy that has persisted for decades. Rumsfeld argued that with tax credits or vouchers, “poor parents would be able to exercise some opportunity to choose, similar to that now enjoyed by wealthier parents, who can move to a ‘better’ public school district or send their children to private schools.”

In a memo to Nixon about the tax-credit idea, Rumsfeld said he thought he could convince Jewish groups that their fears about a violation of the separation of Church and State were “groundless.” However, Rumsfeld went on, “the education lobby ... is clearly correct in perceiving the potential threat that these experiments pose to their comfortable world.” That memo encapsulated Rumsfeld’s brash style, his overconfidence in his persuasive powers, and his eagerness to upset the existing order.

By late 1970 Rumsfeld had decided that it was time to move on. He had managed to keep the OEO from being gutted by the Nixon Administration, but his conservative friends were telling him that he had already stayed in the OEO job too long and that it was becoming a political liability. He also had hopes for a bigger job in the Administration.

Soon after the 1970 congressional elections, in which the Republicans did poorly, Nixon and his team began talking about an Administration shake-up. Rumsfeld figured prominently in the maneuvering. Haldeman wrote in his diary for November 7, 1970, “Decided major personnel changes. [George] Romney out [as secretary of Housing and Urban Development], Rumsfeld to replace him.” But Romney refused to leave, and although Nixon and his aides talked about firing him, the President couldn’t bring himself to do so.

Rumsfeld was moved instead to the White House full-time, as a senior adviser, leaving him on hold for a future Cabinet-level position and postponing the question of exactly what he would do while he waited.

Throughout 1971–1972, while Rumsfeld was serving on the White House staff, he had a series of intermittent private talks with the President about his own future and about American politics, American foreign policy, and the state of the world. Those long, meandering conversations, preserved in Nixon’s tape recordings, provide a remarkable insight into the two men.

Rumsfeld continued to speak up for moderate-to-liberal causes that ran against the generally conservative drift of the Administration. His work at the OEO had given him a constituency and, for a time, a sense of purpose. “We need to be able to communi-

cate with the young and the black and the people who are out, even though we don’t get their vote,” he told Nixon in one private conversation in March of 1971.

Nixon decided that Rumsfeld’s liberalism could be put to good use, winning support in places where the Administration was weak. “I think Rumsfeld doing, frankly, two [kinds of] people, suburbia and young, sounds awfully good,” he told Haldeman. “Forget the environment, farting around with the old folks, the Negroes, and everything. Right now there has to be organized—I want to get something done on college youth.”

Nevertheless, Rumsfeld’s political stances were hard to separate from his intense ambition, which was served by the idea that his progressive views could help the Administration attract support from the political center. Rumsfeld’s plea in behalf of “the young and the black and the people who are out” was made immediately after the President

asked him for his opinion about Vice President Spiro Agnew. Nixon wondered why Agnew was so unpopular.

RUMSFELD: The Vice President's demeanor ... tends to tell people that he's not communicating with them. Look at his background. He came to this straight out of Maryland.

NIXON: Pretty hard to go straight out of Maryland to the top.

RUMSFELD: You better believe it! My goodness. I mean, I had three times as much experience in government as he did.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that Rumsfeld would have liked the President to dump Agnew and run on a Nixon-Rumsfeld ticket in 1972.

The principal item on the agenda in these conversations was Rumsfeld's career. Nixon was engaging in one of his favorite pastimes: dispensing political advice. At the time of their talks both men assumed that Rumsfeld would eventually run for the Senate from his home state of Illinois. The main question was what jobs or experience would help him win a Senate seat. Nixon encouraged him to do something in foreign policy.

"Believe me, in any big sophisticated state, and yours is a big sophisticated state, it's about the world," Nixon told Rumsfeld. "It's not about their miserable little subjects." He recounted his own experience as a representative from

But although he repeatedly dangled the possibility of an assignment overseas or some big new domestic post, Nixon offered nothing specific. "We always expected you to go to a Cabinet spot," he told Rumsfeld in March of 1971. "I still expect you to, but yet the damn thing just hasn't opened up." Four months later he apologized again. "What we talked about is not going to materialize," he told Rumsfeld. Romney was going to stay on in the Cabinet, and so was Transportation Secretary John Volpe, who occupied another job to which Rumsfeld might have been appointed.

While he waited, Rumsfeld did what he could to please the President—and that meant helping out with White House political operations. He worked with Mitchell and Colson, the key figures in Nixon's political apparatus. One bit of help Rumsfeld volunteered was to use his old Princeton ties for secret contact with the Gallup organization, which Colson felt had "dovish" instincts. "We have decided that we'll try Rumsfeld working with Gallup," Colson told the President in July of 1971. "He went to school with George [Gallup] Jr. at Princeton." Nixon and Colson were eager to try to influence the results of major polls, notably Gallup and Harris, perhaps getting the pollsters to phrase their questions or present their results in ways that were helpful to Nixon. "I mean, if the figures aren't up there, we don't want them to lie about it,"

"The only things that matter in the world are Japan and China, Russia and Europe," Nixon told Rumsfeld. "Latin America doesn't matter." Stay away from Africa, too, he warned. "And," he said, "there's nothing you can do about the Middle East."

California, becoming active in the House Un-American Activities Committee and in the investigation of Alger Hiss, so that when he ran for the Senate from California, in 1950, he was considered a foreign-policy "expert" and voters looked up to him.

Rumsfeld agreed that he'd like to be involved in foreign affairs, because "that'd give me a credential." Nixon suggested that Rumsfeld might consider a job in the Defense Department, but warned him away from becoming a secretary of the Army, the Navy, or the Air Force. "The service secretaries, well, they're just warts," the President said. "I like them as individuals, but they do not do important things."

Nixon also outlined which countries and regions of the world might help to further the career of an aspiring politician and which ones wouldn't. "The only things that matter in the world are Japan and China, Russia and Europe," Nixon explained. "Latin America doesn't matter. Long as we've been in it, people don't give one damn about Latin America, Don." Stay away from Africa, too, Nixon warned. As for the Middle East, getting involved there carried too many potential hazards for a politician. "People think it's for the purpose of catering to the Jewish vote," Nixon told Rumsfeld. "And anyway, there's nothing you can do about the Middle East."

Nixon explained to Colson at one point. "They can trim them a little one way or another."

There is no evidence in the Nixon tapes that Rumsfeld tried to sway the outcome of Gallup polls. He did, however, manage to glean some advance information about upcoming Gallup-poll results, giving Nixon a few days to prepare. Rumsfeld appeared to realize that he was asking Gallup to go beyond the traditional independent role of a pollster. At one White House session in October of 1971 Rumsfeld urged Nixon to keep these contacts with the Gallup organization top-secret.

RUMSFELD: Say, I want to just report, sir, about my conversation with George Gallup.

NIXON: Oh yeah, you went to school with him, didn't you?

RUMSFELD: I did. And I kind of want to be awful careful about telling people around the building that I'm talking to him. Because all he's got in his business is his integrity.

Rumsfeld then informed Nixon that soon-to-be-released poll results would show that the President's popularity had recently gone up.

Nixon and Haldeman seemed to believe that their contacts with the Gallup organization were paying off in subtle ways. On the eve of Nixon's trip to China, Haldeman told the President that a Gallup poll would be timed to help

Nixon. "I can't believe that Gallup would tell Rumsfeld that he would *hold* a poll," Nixon exclaimed. "Because Gallup was always, 'Jesus Christ, I call them as I see them.'" Haldeman explained that Gallup wasn't rescheduling the poll itself but merely altering when the results would be made public. "He would wait and release it next month, after you got back," he explained.

Rumsfeld busied himself in other ways. When he and Robert Finch went on their European tour, in the spring of 1971, they focused primarily on the issue of drugs; but Rumsfeld also brought a bit of political dirt home to Nixon. Speaking of the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination, Rumsfeld said that one U.S. ambassador "gave us a pile of bad stuff about Muskie and his extracurricular activities."

Nixon immediately perked up. "What kind of extracurricular activities?" he asked. "Business? Women?"

Rumsfeld apparently hadn't thought to be quite as inquisitive as Nixon. "I took it to be business or women," he replied vaguely. Thus he carefully passed on the ambassador's message without getting involved in the details, leaving them for the President to pursue on his own if he wished. (Nothing ever came of the allegation, which, it appears, was without substance.)

For Rumsfeld, the amorphous job of White House counselor was frustrating. He had no agency or department to run, and no particular mission. He kept pushing Nixon for some specific task. "You once told me I should do something in a line area, and I agree," he told the President. "I like that. There is a problem, potentially, with a guy floating around the White House." If he was going to stay in the White House, he suggested, he should have a specific title or portfolio.

Nixon's top aides had disliked Rumsfeld since the start of the Administration, and especially resented him after he became a full-time White House aide. "The senior staff grew to realize that the ambitious Rumsfeld would decline every assignment that did not enhance his personal goals," John Ehrlichman later wrote.

At one time or another Rumsfeld tossed out possibilities to Nixon: Secretary of Commerce, an emissary to Latin America, or "something in the trade area," as well as special envoy for postwar reconstruction in Vietnam. He also appears to have asked friends to put in a good word for him with the President when a job opened up as ambassador to Japan. Nixon grouched to Haldeman that someone had suggested "maybe I could talk him into" the Tokyo job. "I'm not going to talk him into doing *anything*," Nixon said. "If Rumsfeld wants to be an ambassador, let him say so! But Jesus Christ, Bob, what the hell—I don't think Rumsfeld can do Japan, you know, because I don't think he'd be tough enough [for] our side, the side of business, you know what I mean?"

Finally, in the summer of 1971, Nixon settled on what

he could offer. He suggested the possibility of Rumsfeld's becoming U.S. ambassador to NATO. Rumsfeld was interested. "It would certainly fill a gap in my background," he told the President.

Yet Rumsfeld was wary. Nixon's first appointee as NATO ambassador had been Ellsworth, who was handed the job after a brief stint in the White House during which he ran afoul of others in the Nixon Administration. Rumsfeld told the President that when Ellsworth became NATO ambassador, "it looked as if he was being dumped." Rumsfeld didn't want his own appointment to NATO to be handled "in a way that it looked like I was being kicked upstairs." Don't worry, Nixon replied.

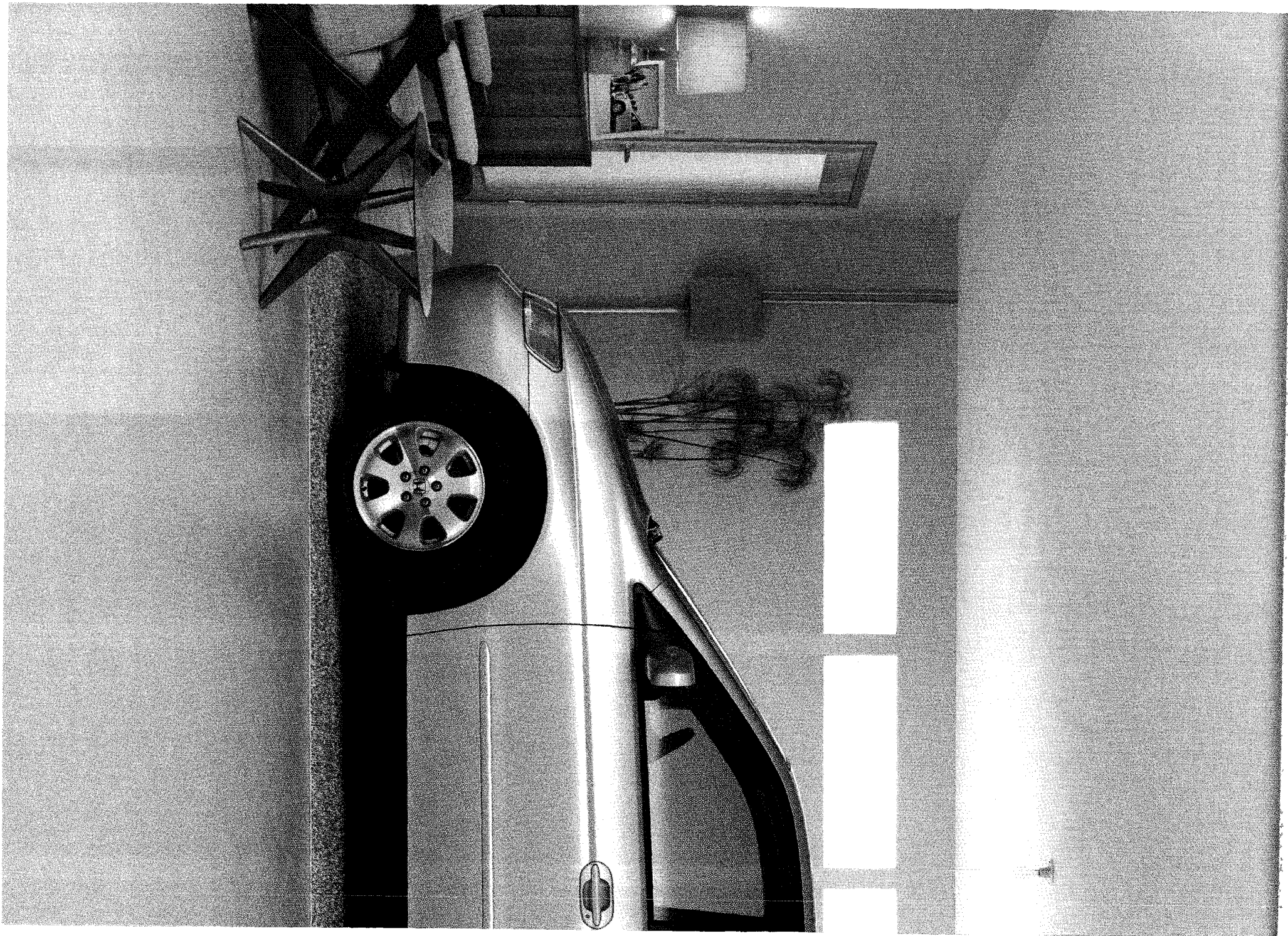
Nixon, it turned out, was even more hesitant. Six days after the President had broached the NATO job to Rumsfeld, his own top aides urged him to delay the appointment until after the re-election campaign. Haldeman relayed to the President the advice from Mitchell: "He said he'd strongly urge, don't let him go to NATO, he is a very valuable property here ... John thinks it's ridiculous to send him on foreign missions."

The solution was to postpone the NATO appointment for more than a year, until Nixon's second term. In the meantime, the President found other work for his restless young adviser. That fall Nixon named Rumsfeld to run the new Cost of Living Council, which temporarily kept him busy. Meanwhile, Rumsfeld went on serving as a go-between with the Gallup organization, giving speeches for the Administration, and doing other political chores.

Nothing was made final until after Nixon's re-election. By that time the White House aides with whom Rumsfeld was regularly at odds would have been happy to get him out of the Administration entirely. Haldeman recorded in his diary that in a meeting with Ehrlichman on November 20, 1972, Rumsfeld had appeared to agree to go back to Illinois and run for the Senate. "But then when he got in the meeting with the president, he said no, that just wouldn't do, that he had to have an Administration job for a year, which was a complete shock to the President and Ehrlichman," Haldeman claimed. "Typical Rumsfeld, rather slimy maneuver." Rumsfeld finally prevailed on Nixon to give him the NATO ambassadorship.

The following year Haldeman and Ehrlichman both lost their White House jobs as the Watergate scandal grew ever wider. Meanwhile, Rumsfeld was safely off in Europe, far removed from the taint of the Nixon White House. Eventually the details of his service for Nixon would largely be forgotten; few would remember the era long ago when Donald Rumsfeld was a dove, more interested in issues of postwar reconstruction than in war itself. ▀

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There are minivans, then there's the Odyssey.



OUR FIRST ANNUAL COLLEGE-ADMISSIONS SURVEY

"Calm down!" the deans and counselors say. Herewith an exploration of the American college-admissions system

Here is the problem with the college-admissions system. It is a vast and intricate bureaucracy designed to do one thing, and it does that very well; but it is under intense social and economic pressure to do something different—something more or less directly at odds with its supposed goal. The resulting tensions affect everyone involved: The high school guidance counselors who try to steer students toward the right school. The college admissions officers who sort through ever mounting piles of applications to choose an entering class. The college administrators who wonder how many of those accepted will enroll—and how many of them will need financial aid. The parents who contemplate what will be (after housing) the second largest financial outlay of their lives. And, of course, the students themselves.

What the admissions system is really designed for is the subtle, subjective work of matching millions of students with thousands of schools. Romantic images are often used to describe this process—finding a date, choosing a spouse—and the comparisons do apply. In higher education, as in dating or marriage, individual tastes and needs differ. There are widely agreed-upon ideas of more and less attractive partners, but there is no single “best” or “right” choice. If one matchup doesn’t work, many others are available.

There are plenty of fish in the sea. American colleges are unbelievably varied. There are thousands of institutions of post-high school instruction in the United States: more than 2,300 four-year colleges, more than 1,800 two-year colleges, and an unknown but large number of trade schools, technical institutes, art or music centers, and other specialized schools. There are night schools for people with

jobs; online or written correspondence courses for people in remote locations; universities in big cities and on secluded campuses in Oregon and Maine. There are technical institutes—for music, nursing, forestry, aviation—and colleges that emphasize the classics. The American higher-education establishment includes the Air Force Academy and Juilliard, Bob Jones University and Caltech.

The people who make the educational matchmaking system go—the high school counselors and college admissions officers—are surprisingly idealistic about trying to find in this dizzying range the right school for each student. They are modestly paid; they complain frequently about pressure from anxious parents; they compete fiercely in the admissions derby. But they believe in what they are doing. When they talk about serving a student’s best interests, they sound less jaded than politicians do when talking about serving the public interest—or lawyers do about serving justice, or journalists do about serving the truth.

Then we have the reality that none of these counselors and officers like but all of them recognize: admissions is a battlefield in a brutal competition for prestige. Everyone in America’s college-aspirant class understands how this works. “Going Ivy” is a win. Being stuck at a safety school is a loss. The real admissions system is creative in finding room for everyone. The trophy admissions system is a you-versus-me competition for a limited number of spaces at a handful of schools. The real system emphasizes how many places a student might be happy. The trophy system emphasizes how few. The real system puts its greatest stress on what a student will do after he or she starts college. The trophy system cares only where he or she gets in.

IN THIS SECTION

.....

ADMISSIONS TRENDS

The New College Chaos
by James Fallows

PAGE 106

SAFETY NET

The Late-Decision Program
by V. V. Ganeshanathan

PAGE 116

RANKINGS

What Makes a College Good?
by Nicholas Confessore

PAGE 118

The Selectivity Illusion

by Don Peck

PAGE 128

TESTING STANDARDS

The Bias Question
by Jay Mathews

PAGE 130



Status competition is natural to people, and exclusive affiliations have always been valued for their sheer exclusivity. Otherwise there would be no such concept as the A-list. The mystery in college admissions is how one factor in choosing a desirable college—the appeal of selective schools simply because they are hard to get into—became *the* factor for an influential minority of ambitious Americans.

The purpose of this special section, which will be an annual fall feature, is to examine the admissions system as it is meant to work—and to explore the realities of its current operation and their implications for students, parents, and the colleges themselves. Our goal is to give high school students and their families a practical sense of what to expect from the process, to help them find the best match of student and college. As part of that continuing process we will canvass high schools and colleges for advance signs of changes in admissions.

For the inauguration of this special feature *Atlantic* reporters interviewed many dozens of admissions directors and high school counselors, asking which trends they thought would most affect students in the coming year. One result of that reporting is “The New College Chaos” (below), by James Fallows, which describes what students should know about the new level of unpredictability and commercialism in the admissions system, and how counselors believe students can cope with it.

This issue also addresses a basic question in admissions: how parents and students should think about “desirable” schools, and whether current systems of ranking and rating schools identify the right traits. In “What Makes a College Good?” Nicholas Confessore discusses a new assessment system designed (imagine!) to measure how well students learn to read, write, and think once they are in college. To demonstrate the strengths and limitations of rating systems *The Atlantic* conceived a rating system of its own (see “The Selectivity Illusion,” by Don Peck).

In “The Bias Question,” Jay Mathews reports on charges of ethnic bias in the SAT by a former ETS employee.

Finally, in “The Late-Decision Program,” V. V. Ganesananthan reveals a little-known but important safety net in the admissions process whereby thousands of students get a second chance at finding the right school.

Writing about the stresses and uncertainties in the admissions process carries a risk. The counselors and admissions officers we interviewed said time and again that their collective message to America’s parents is “Calm down!” A realistic portrayal of the admissions system might not have that effect initially. But the more clearly students and their parents understand how many choices they have, and how hard the real system will try to find the right match for them, the more confident they should be. In that spirit we offer our first College-Admissions Survey.

THE NEW COLLEGE CHAOS

College admissions officers say they now have many, many more applications than they know how to handle—and, often, less reliable information to help them decide which students to admit

BY JAMES FALLOWS

Getting into college has always been stressful. But this year the experience is likely to be different from that of only three or four years ago, and in many ways worse. This, at least, was the implication of an extensive series of interviews that *Atlantic* reporters conducted over the spring and summer with college admissions officers and high school guidance counselors from across the country.

The people we spoke with came from a wide variety of institutions—public and private, large and small, religious and secular, with national or only regional reputations. Nearly all these people said that they wished parents and students would worry less about the admissions process. Most went on to point out how open, varied, and accessible American colleges actually are, for students who bother to look past the two or three dozen most sought-after institutions. The vast majority of American students do look

further. Nearly three million people finish American high schools each year, and two million of them seek additional education; of those, perhaps 250,000, less than one tenth of all graduates, are involved in the struggle for places in the most selective schools. Admissions officials emphasized time and again that every observation about the pressure and uncertainty at those selective institutions should be balanced with a reminder of how accommodating and flexible the college network is as a whole.

An unusual number of admissions-related issues have been in the news this year, and officials naturally discussed the impact of specific recent events and trends—the implications of this summer’s Supreme Court rulings on affirmative action; surprising changes in how the quest for gender and geographic diversity affects admissions decisions; the latest twists in the controversy over early-decision admissions plans. But their observations on what is new and significant for the

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high school class of 2004 centered on two big and far less publicized themes. One is that the admissions system is becoming more chaotic and unpredictable, the other that it is becoming more corporate and “marketized.”

The system is chaotic because it is overloaded. Changes in demographics, technology, and society have saddled the most selective colleges with more applications than they know how to handle. More applications means an even higher rate of rejections, which makes a college statistically more “selective.” Perversely, this makes it all the more attractive to the next crop of applicants, and the cycle goes on. The same forces have increased the number of schools considered highly selective. As a result, students—along with their parents and counselors—have a harder time predicting where they will get in. “The crystal ball has become a lot less clear,” Larry Momo, a veteran counselor at the Trinity School, in New York City, says. For related reasons, colleges themselves have a harder time predicting who will actually enroll. The result is a wave of understandable but collectively detrimental behavior by all parties—colleges, high schools, parents, applicants—that feeds what Mark Davis, the headmaster of another private school, St. Luke’s, in Connecticut, calls “the national hysteria about college admissions.”

schools, because their record in college placements was not impressive enough.

As with other institutions—medicine, the media, the law—that have become more marketized in the past decade, this change has brought some improvements. A more open market for college admissions, no matter how fevered, is still fairer than the old system, which petered out in the mid-1960s, whereby Exeter’s headmaster could earmark a few dozen of each year’s seniors for admission to Harvard. But as in these other increasingly market-minded fields, some of the changes undermine what had been fundamental ideals and values.

Why is the system overloaded? The answer starts with the rising number of high school graduates in the past few years and then takes some surprising turns.

In the early 1980s about three million students finished American high schools each year. Since 2000 the number has been about the same. But during the intervening period the high school population went through a long decline. The classes that finished high school from 1991 to 1996 contained barely 2.5 million students each. So even if nothing else had changed, getting into any given

The system is chaotic because it is overloaded. The result is a wave of collectively detrimental behavior by all parties—colleges, high schools, parents, applicants—that feeds what one headmaster calls “the national hysteria about college admissions.”

The system has become “marketized” in the sense that its participants need increasingly to think of themselves in business terms. A whole industry of “enrollment management” consultants has arisen to handle what is ordinarily known as “admissions” and was once quaintly called “crafting a class.” For all but the richest ten or twenty universities, an important part of managing enrollment is being sure that enough paying customers will show up each fall—and that not too many students will take the school up on its offer to give financial aid to those who need it. (Most private colleges say they will provide need-based aid, but shrunken endowments mean that what they can cover is limited.) Students are taught to think about the “package” of accomplishments they will present to admissions committees. At the private schools and high-end public schools where admissions mania is most intense, counselors are expected to supply students and parents with a “product”—namely, admissions to prestigious schools. Many high school counselors can recount some variant on the following story. A student has just gotten into, say, Tufts or Pomona, which have become very selective. The counselor, hearing from the parents, starts to offer congratulations and is cut off by a bellow: “What happened with Yale?” A few counselors describe colleagues who were forced out, especially at private

college should be 20 percent harder now than it was a decade ago, because there are that many more contenders.

In fact the increase in difficulty is much greater, and even more so at very selective schools, because so many other factors have changed. Back in the “baby bust” years, when weak colleges worried about simply meeting enrollment targets and strong ones worried about losing the best candidates to rivals, colleges launched creative efforts to drive up demand. They intensified the “junior mailing” program, and high school students whose test scores or other traits made them attractive found their mailboxes full of brochures urging them to think about Vassar or Tulane. (The colleges bought the data from the Educational Testing Service, which had collected demographic information from students who enrolled for tests and later matched it with their test scores.) Mailings now go out to high school sophomores and, according to a recent report prepared by Edward Gillis, the admissions director at the University of Miami, even freshmen. Early-decision programs, which effectively offer an edge to students who promise to enroll, also took off as a recruitment tool. (See “The Early-Decision Racket,” September 2001 *Atlantic*.)

In the 1990s colleges put more time and money into admissions-office “road trips”—tours to high schools in distant

parts of the country, so that more California students might try for Duke and more New Yorkers would think of Occidental. Most colleges broadened their applicant pool, and by now as many as fifty have joined the previously small group of colleges that are truly "national," drawing strong applicants from every part of the country. Robert Zemsky, the chair of the Learning Alliance for Higher Education, at the University of Pennsylvania, coined the term "national students" to describe those who compete for places in selective colleges in any part of the country. Compared with local, regional, or in-state students, who apply only within their home area, national students have higher grades and SAT scores, Zemsky found, and better overall records. The more of them who apply to any given college, the stiffer the competition for everyone else. Colleges also became more serious about attracting an international student body. Candidates from, especially, the former Soviet bloc, India, and China have increased both the size and the quality of the applicant pool.

These and other measures were in response to the shortage of students in the early 1990s. But the demand-building measures remained generally in place when U.S. high schools began turning out more graduates. Then two trends intensified the pressure even more.

One was the increased popularity of the Common Application—a form, including a personal essay of 250 to 500 words, that students fill out once and send to multiple colleges. The Common Application was introduced in the 1970s, but only in the past decade or so did a significant number of highly selective colleges, including Yale, Harvard, and Johns Hopkins, decide to accept it (though some required additional information). Before the Common era, applying to a selective college meant filling out a separate form for each, usually writing a separate essay, and sometimes getting a new set of recommendations from teachers and advisers. But with the Common Application it can mean merely paying an additional application fee, often \$50 to \$90 per college. The convenience of the process has naturally increased the number of schools a typical student will try.

Princeton, Stanford, the University of Chicago, and a few other selective institutions do not accept the Common Application (Chicago pointedly calls its form The Uncommon Application). But even these schools are affected by

the second trend: online applications. The Common Application can be filled out and submitted online. Virtually all schools allow students to download and print their own application form rather than asking for it by mail, and many allow students to conduct nearly the whole application process electronically. (High school transcripts and teacher recommendations are usually delivered the old-fashioned way.) Jim Bock, the dean of admissions and financial aid at Swarthmore, says that in the past four years the number of students applying online has risen by more than 500 percent.

Not every admissions dean we spoke with said that the combined effect of these forces was to drive applications up, up, up. At Georgetown and Penn, for example, applications have recently leveled off—albeit at a very high level. (Georgetown received more than 15,000 applications in

2002, for a freshman class of 1,485. That is twice the rate of ten years ago, but only a slight increase over the two previous years. The trend is similar at Penn.) Some single-sex schools have seen only modest increases.

But many admissions deans use terms like "flood" and "torrent" to describe what is happening. Williams College received 5,341 applications last year, for a freshman class of 533; that was 410 more than the previous year. Last year Boston College received 22,400 applications, for a class of 2,250 students; in 1996 it

received 16,500. Schools suddenly turn "hot" and see spikes in the application rate. "Hotness" often reflects a belated recognition of a school's improved quality. Duke, Georgetown, and Brown experienced this more than a decade ago, and it is now happening at the University of Southern California, New York University, Tufts, and Washington University in St. Louis, among others. But colleges sometimes go in and out of fashion for reasons that have nothing to do with undergraduate academics. Columbia and Penn have become hot as urban schools have become more popular. Both Georgetown and Duke attracted many more applicants after their teams did well in the NCAA basketball tournament. When Ronald Reagan was shot, in 1981, he was rushed to the George Washington University Hospital emergency room. Applications to George Washington rose noticeably afterward, apparently because of the favorable publicity.



There is no clearinghouse to measure the overall increase in applications. Even if there were, the total would be misleading, because the real problem is the attempt of a minority of students to get into a minority of colleges. "Eighty percent of the [extra] applications are going to twenty percent of the schools" is the way Lee Stetson, the admissions dean at the University of Pennsylvania, which is among the favored 20 percent, puts it. Walt Whitman High School, in Bethesda, Maryland, had 468 seniors in last year's graduating class. Fifty-three of them applied to Northwestern.

One of those fifty-three students applied to twenty-three other colleges. Counselors at upper-end public and private high schools nearly all report an increase in the number of applications each college-bound student submits. At admissions-conscious schools where students in the early 1990s typically applied to five or six colleges, they might now apply to eight, ten, or twelve. In more relaxed settings the average has risen from three or four to six or eight. Counselors consider twenty outrageous—but some say they have seen that and more. "Students have the idea that if they throw more darts at the board, their chances go up," says Carl Ahlgren, the director of college counseling at the Gilman School, a private boys'

less time to do it, and—surprisingly—less data to rely on in making their decisions.

The traditional bases for admissions decisions at highly selective colleges are high school academic performance, SAT scores, recommendations, and then everything else, including students' essays. High school grades are still the most important factor, but top-end schools are rapidly abandoning official class ranking in their calculations. The complaint about ranking is that it exaggerates small differences among students, poisons the high school atmosphere, and implicitly penalizes students for being in excellent schools, with many strong colleagues, rather than in mediocre ones. (At the most selective colleges admissions officers are familiar with the high schools that have historically sent them strong applicants, and they know how to interpret a course list, even without a class rank.) All that is true; still, the elimination of ranking leaves colleges with one less piece of information.

SATs are simultaneously all-important and decreasingly important as distinguishing tools. The great "recentering" of SAT scores in the mid-1990s was designed to adjust the scoring curve to reflect the broadened share of American students taking the SAT, which had at first been given

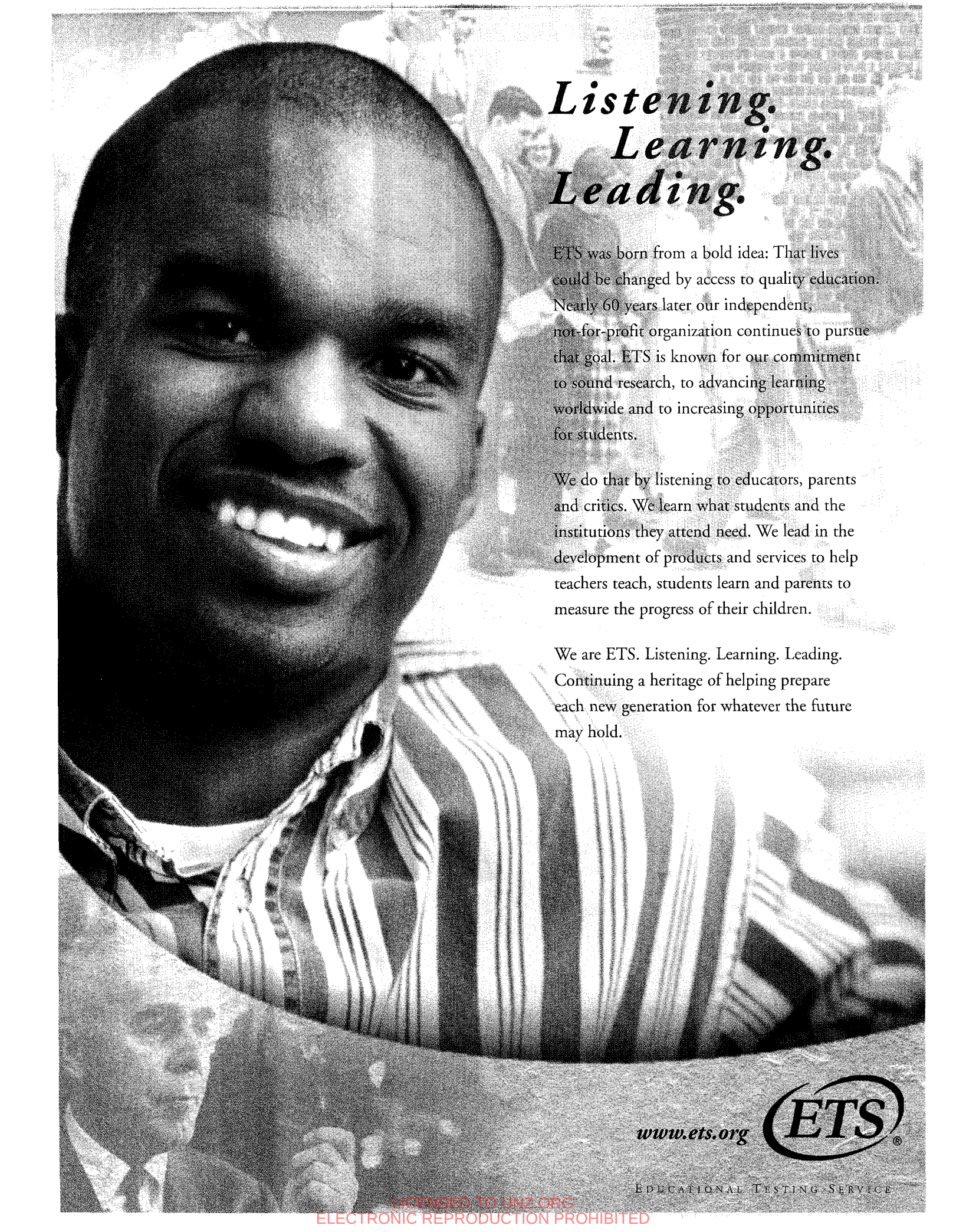
One could make a good case for admitting the students in, say, Yale's freshman class of 1,300, but one could also make a good case for an entirely different set of students. "If it feels like a lottery," says one admissions director, "that's not very satisfying."

school in Baltimore. Ahlgren says that in his experience exactly the opposite is true: the more careful and deliberate students are about choosing where to apply, the more likely they are to get in. At his previous school, University Liggett, in Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan, Ahlgren ran a small study correlating the number of applications a student filed with overall admission success. The students with the highest rate of admission turned out to be those who applied to three or fewer schools; those with the lowest applied to eleven or more. The likely reason, Ahlgren said, is that the decision to fill out "that twelfth or fifteenth application" often "goes hand in hand with a quality of indifference, almost cynicism, about the applications"—and colleges notice.

The pressure this situation creates for students is well known—even if, in the view of some officials, its damaging effects are still not fully appreciated. For instance, Robin Mamlet, the dean of admissions and financial aid at Stanford, says she is "deeply concerned about the level of stress on young people as a serious national health issue." Less well known are the corresponding effects on those receiving the new flow of applications: the college admissions staffs. Compared with their situation even five years ago, admissions officers have more work to do, often

mainly to elite students. The recentering raised average scores significantly, especially on the verbal portion of the test. "Before, there were very few seven hundred-plus verbal scores," says Charles Deacon, the dean of admissions at Georgetown. "Afterwards there was a dramatic surge upward, and many more people saw themselves as competitive candidates for the top schools." Marlyn McGrath-Lewis, the admissions director at Harvard College, says that "the double 800"—a perfect score—"is not that great a distinction anymore." In each of the past few years Harvard has received more than 500 applications with double-800 scores, and has accepted just under half of them.

Colleges also have a harder time relying on recommendations from teachers and counselors, who are under increasing pressure to turn out more recommendations for more students. An admissions dean at one college reported getting identical recommendations from the same harried teachers for different students in the same high school class. Colleges don't always know whether to trust the students' own essays, because they are so easily polished by advisers or coaches, to say nothing of being simply copied in the first place. A Web search for "admissions essays" quickly illustrates the opportunity for students and the problem for colleges. Scores of companies will edit, revise, critique,



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or outright produce a student essay. "All of us worry about the degree to which an application has been scrubbed in the independent schools and the affluent publics," says Tom Parker, the dean of admissions and financial aid at Amherst. John Latting, the admissions director at Johns Hopkins, who previously worked at Caltech, says of applications that clearly seem to have been polished, "There is a growing sense of unease: Where does this come from? Whose voice is this?"

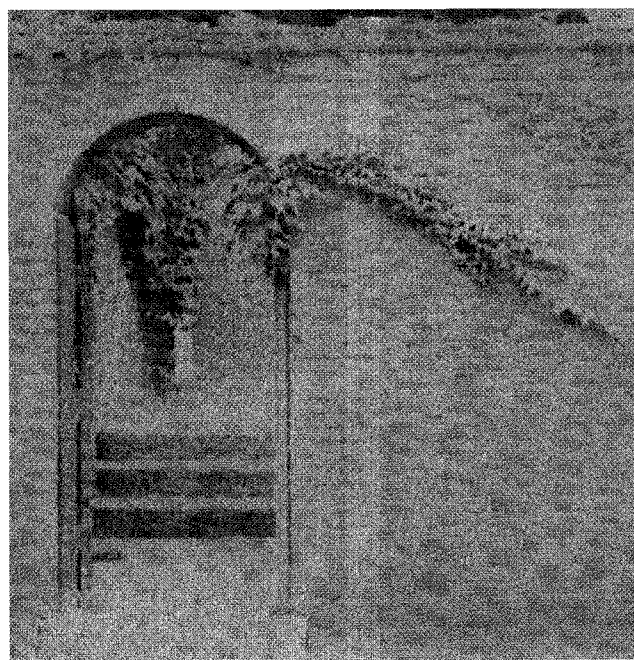
As the volume of applications has risen, the size of admissions staffs has increased modestly if at all. One admissions officer says his office is handling 75 percent more applications than it did ten years ago, with roughly the same number of staff members. Others report a variety of coping mechanisms: bringing in part-time volunteer "readers" from the faculty; practicing a more ruthless form of triage, in order to concentrate on applicants with a serious shot at getting in; reading more quickly; simply spending more hours on the job. Karen Cottrell, the dean of admissions at William and Mary, says that her staff has met the challenge by working "until two in the morning seven days a week" during the months of December, January, and February.

The colleges do their best, and under the circumstances they make wise decisions. But because those circumstances have become so odd (so many students to reject, so few quantifiable differences among applicants), the process has become fundamentally less predictable than it was in the recent past. One could make a good case for admitting the students in, say, Yale's freshman class of 1,300, but one could make just about as good a case for an entirely different set of students. "You feel things slipping between your fingers," John Latting says. "If it feels like a lottery that we're running, that's not very satisfying. We want to make good decisions based on sound evidence, but the nature of the evidence seems to be changing." He means the decreasing usefulness of SATs, class rank, essays, and recommendations. Commenting on the same changes, Daniel Saracino, the dean of admissions at Notre Dame, says simply, "With highly selective institutions there is no way to predict with confidence whether a student will get in."

Thus the chaos that many of our interviewees emphasize. It has short-term perverse effects, mainly in motivating students, since they're less certain of getting into any schools, to apply to even *more*, thereby worsening the prob-

lem for everyone. It is also connected to the No. 1 lament of high school counselors and college admissions officers: the neurotic intrusiveness of parents. "Pushy parents come with the territory," says a veteran counselor at an elite private school. But the clear message from the admissions establishment to parents is, *Please* back off.

"While the parents are anxious to help, we want them to understand that the process belongs to the student," says Nanette Tarbouni, the admissions director at the newly hot Washington University. "I'll get a call from a parent saying, 'I'm working on my daughter's application ...'" Robin Mamlet, the dean of admissions and financial aid at Stanford, says, "Noisy parents and students have always been there, but they are especially active this year." Saracino says, "Parents will call up and say, 'We're applying ...' I'd like them to repeat after me: 'We are not applying; my child is applying.'"



The uncertainty of today's admissions climate is connected to the other big theme that ran through our interviews: the increasing marketization of the process. Some aspects of this effect have been widely publicized—for instance, the rise of costly admissions counselors, especially in New York, who charge tens of thousands of dollars to advise students on where and how to apply. The most notorious of these is Katherine Cohen, of IvyWise, in Manhattan, who was profiled at length in *New York* magazine.

She offers a "platinum package" for students that lasts two years and costs \$32,995. Colleges themselves have turned to enrollment-management firms for advice on how to attract the students they want. The best known of these is called Noel-Levitz. Its Web site is almost beyond parody, with consultant-speak applied to the business of recruiting, admitting, and retaining students. For instance, the company's consultants can provide "Institutional Image and Competitive Positioning Analysis™"—a "complete enrollment research package [that] offers comprehensive decision data for image enhancement and strategic market positioning." The site continues, "The analysis prepares your institution to compete effectively in its marketplace and to distinguish itself from institutions vying for the same student populations."

But some other aspects of the marketization of admissions have received less public notice than our interviewees think they deserve. These are the related phenomena of

waiting-list management, “expressed interest” measures, and “merit aid.”

The problem all these tools are designed to solve is a college’s surprising lack of control over the makeup of its entering class. To students, a college seems to be in complete control. But once the acceptance letters go out, the balance of power changes. The same uncertainty that plagues students affects colleges when it comes to “yield.” Even the most selective colleges know that at most just over half of those they admit will end up enrolling. A college that has learned to expect a 50 percent yield therefore sends out 2,000 acceptances to muster a freshman class of 1,000. But the college can’t know exactly how many will accept. Worse, it can’t know *which ones*. In putting together its admittee list it took great pains to strike a balance—men and women, athletes and musicians, black and white, rich and poor. But the vagaries of yield mean that it can end up with a class quite different from what it had in mind. Nearly all the black students might accept—or nearly none. It might have three first-trombone players for the band—and no chemistry students. It might find that a large number of students who need financial aid have accepted—and only a few who can pay their own way.

Thus the colleges look for buffers and safeguards to give

lists can be a way to soften the blow for the children of alumni or for members of other important constituencies, rather than rejecting them outright. At some schools the lists, strangely, have also become a repository for some of the most highly qualified applicants. These colleges know that they are being used as safety schools by students who really want to get into more prestigious and selective institutions. Some safety schools welcome the role, for the occasional extra-strong student it brings them. Many others resent being taken for granted—and react by putting “overqualified” applicants on the waiting list rather than, as they see it, “wasting an admit” on them.

But the main reason for long waiting lists is enrollment management. To return to Williams: about half of the people it placed on its waiting list in early April did not send back the required confirmation that they wanted to stay on the list. Either they had decided to accept a spot elsewhere or they had lost interest in Williams. By early May, as students sent in their enrollment deposits, Williams was beginning to get an idea of how many of those admitted—and which ones—would be attending, and therefore what holes in the class it still had to fill. The number it admits from the list varies, but last year it was thirty-seven. These were not nec-

The No. 1 lament of high school counselors and college admissions officers is the neurotic intrusiveness of parents. “Pushy parents come with the territory,” says one counselor. But the clear message from the admissions establishment is, *Please back off.*

them some control. The waiting list is a crucial tool. Students and parents may think of the waiting list as something like a queue in a bakery, or the standby list for an airline flight—that is, a predictable system for determining who comes ahead of whom. The reality of waiting lists is different. The main surprise is that they are huge. Very selective colleges may put hundreds of applicants on the list and ultimately admit only ten or twenty. Harvard is a dramatic case: in recent years it has put significantly more people on its waiting list than it has accepted in its springtime admissions cycle. Harvard typically accepts about 1,000 applicants in the fall under its nonbinding “early-action” program, and another 1,000 in the spring in the “regular” cycle. According to informed accounts, in the spring Harvard also places as many as 1,500 students on the waiting list, of whom it ultimately admits very few—typically a handful, and in some years none. Marlyn McGrath-Lewis, the Harvard undergraduate-admissions director, declined comment on such reports, but she said that the list contains “several hundred” members. Williams is more representative of elite schools. Last spring it sent acceptance letters to 936 students, on top of the 193 it had accepted under its binding early-decision plan, and it put 700 to 800 more on the waiting list.

Why so many? There are some incidental reasons. Waiting

essarily the ones who’d originally come closest to admission but those whose traits and skills best balanced the class. This is the main reason for such long waiting lists—to have access to what the dean of another school calls “critical mass,” in a variety of categories, to add whatever element a class seems to lack. Men, surprisingly, are a new category: gender ratios at liberal-arts colleges across the country are tipping in favor of women, and some schools have reportedly begun practicing a stealth form of affirmative action that favors male applicants. Like all colleges, Williams then had to allow for “summer melt”—the students who have accepted, enrolled, and paid their deposits, but for a variety of reasons withdraw during the summer; the school took a few more from the list to compensate.

To further reduce uncertainty, many colleges have begun examining students’ “expressed interest” and in effect adding a new category of financial aid, called “merit aid.” Each is a deceptively bland-sounding practice that has become surprisingly controversial among admissions professionals.

Colleges that reward expressed interest are really doing nothing more than giving an edge to applicants who demonstrate that they are very interested in attending. In practice this means keeping track of the seriousness of a student’s application. Some of the indicators—and the

fact that colleges track them—would be obvious to an applicant poring over the fine print of admissions brochures, and some might not. Did she show up when college representatives visited her high school? Did she and her parents come visit the college and pick up material in the admissions office? Has she corresponded with the office? As best the college can guess, is she applying for real? And skipping ahead—if she applied and made it only to the waiting list, is she still serious about the school? If invited, will she accept?

This sounds perfectly commonsensical. But such measures could lead to a new kind of bias. The main professional group involved in college admissions, the National Association for College Admission Counseling, or NACAC, has begun studying the effects of such expressed-interest measures. NACAC's concern is that students who already have plenty on their side—those who are most sophisticated, best coached, and generally richest—will only gain a further advantage. Joyce Smith, the executive director of NACAC, has said that the more schools reward expressed interest, the more they penalize those who are unaware of this new twist. That, she says, includes students whose parents didn't go to college, immigrants, members of racial minorities, international students, and graduates of large

and more students requesting aid, they are protecting themselves by limiting their potential obligations to such students.

Merit aid—scholarship offers to students with strong high school records, even if they don't demonstrate financial need—seems like a logical solution. The idea that non-need scholarships can attract exceptional students is not new: it was behind the National Merit Scholarship program. The University of Virginia holds competitions for its Jefferson Scholars program, which covers all costs of attending the university. The Robertson Scholars program does something similar for students at Duke and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, as does the Flinn Foundation for students at Arizona's public universities.

What is different now is the routine use of smaller merit offers to attract students—and, surprisingly, to conserve a college's resources. How? An annual grant of, say, \$5,000, offered in the financial-aid package that comes with spring admissions letters, might be enough to draw in a student whose family can cover the rest of the bill. That place might otherwise have been filled by someone whose request for need-based aid would have been much greater. "I call this kind of assistance 'non-need-based' aid, rather than 'merit' aid," says John Mahoney, the director of undergraduate

Most of the people we spoke with pointed out how open, varied, and accessible American colleges actually are, for students who bother to look past the few dozen most sought-after schools. The vast majority of American students do look further.

public schools with small counseling staffs. Students who can't afford to travel for college visits are also at a disadvantage. Such discrimination is obviously not the colleges' intention; but a tool to reduce uncertainty and make admissions more businesslike could have that effect. The NACAC study is due out this winter.

Schools' growing focus on merit aid has provoked similar concerns. Since the expansion of college enrollment after World War II, colleges have generally proclaimed their belief in need-blind admissions—that is, they say that family wealth should not be a factor in judging students' applications. The corollary has been need-based aid—offering loans, grants, and scholarships to ensure that anyone the college admits can afford to attend.

By most estimates, fewer than ten schools are rich enough to apply both parts of the formula completely. Carleton College attracted widespread notice several years ago when it announced that it would no longer be fully need-blind in its admissions. Carleton had developed a reputation as the school for poor but very bright applicants, and it was getting more scholarship students than it could support. Many other private colleges are putting such a change into effect without announcing it. With donations down, endowments shrunken, government grants being cut,

admissions at Boston College. "Not all the students getting it are at the very top of the talent pool. They're solid students—and the college figures that by offering them a modest amount of aid, it can affect their enrollment decision."

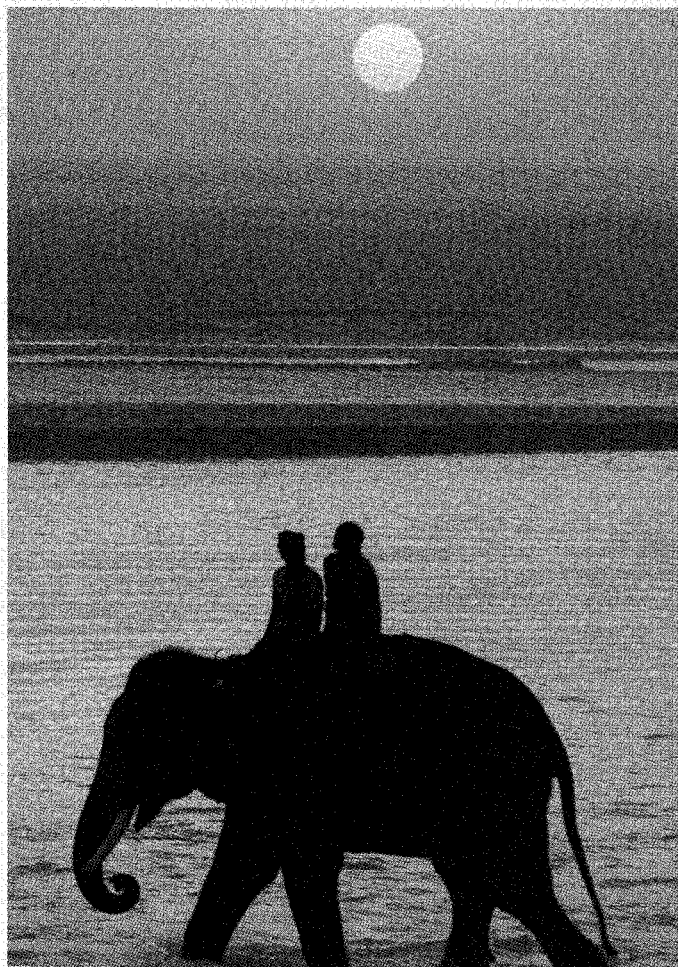
The changed, more businesslike landscape means advantages for well-informed, connected students, and disadvantages for everyone else. The people we interviewed took seriously the role of American colleges as engines of fairness and mobility, and said this swing away from need-based aid should be watched closely—and, when possible, reversed.

Above all, the counselors and admissions officers who match students with colleges emphasized how many opportunities the current system provides—and repeated their hope that even amid the potential distractions and anxieties of this year's (temporary, they hope) chaos, students and their families will remain both calm and confident about ending up at the right school. ▀

James Fallows is a national correspondent for The Atlantic. His Atlantic cover story last November, "The Fifty-first State?" about postwar Iraq, won the 2003 National Magazine Award for Public Interest. His books include Free Flight: Inventing the Future of Travel (2001), Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy (1996), and Looking at the Sun: The Rise of the New East Asian Economic and Political System (1994).

Research for this article was conducted by Dennis Bakke, V. V. Ganeshanathan, and Chris Johnson.

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THE LATE-DECISION PROGRAM

Most people have heard of early-decision programs. But there's also a little-known safety net at the other end of the process, to catch those who don't get in anywhere

BY V. V. GANESHANANTHAN

This past year a senior at a competitive public high school in Massachusetts entered what could be described as the ninth circle of college-application hell: she applied to seven schools and got into none. By conventional measures she seemed like a strong candidate. An aspiring aeronautical engineer, she had a 4.1 weighted grade-point average late in her senior year, took mostly honors or Advanced Placement courses, played the upright bass, played softball and field hockey and ran cross-country, and had reached the regional level in a science competition. Her combined SAT score was 1380. She is also related to a longtime faculty member at the school to which she applied early. But none of these things gave any of the highly selective schools to which she applied—Bowdoin, Colby, Cornell, Dartmouth, MIT, Vassar, and Wesleyan—sufficient reason to accept her. Her parents wanted her to go to school in the fall. So she applied again.

For a high school senior, wanting a college and not having one to attend is like being dateless for the prom. It's not that no one wanted to be your date—you just didn't ask the person who did. American colleges and universities collectively have more than enough room for everyone who wants to attend. But the two sides of the process don't always match up perfectly: qualified students find themselves without colleges; excellent schools find themselves with empty seats in the freshman class. The college-application season is usually thought to end in April, when colleges send out their decisions—or at the beginning of May, when students send in commitment deposits. But for some, this time is just the beginning of an underpublicized late-admission process.

The most important tool in this process is something that became available directly to students just a few years ago. Each year between May and August the National Association for College Admission Counseling maintains a space-availability survey—a continually updated list of schools seeking students. As late as this July about 300 schools were still on the list of those looking for fall matriculants. Although NACAC does not keep official statistics on how many people apply late each year, the organization estimates that the number is in the thousands. The survey, which is available free on the Internet, received more than 20,000 unique hits this past year. It is searchable by state, and schools on the list indicate whether they have financial aid or housing still available. (Applying late is considerably

harder for students without much capital; very few schools offer financial aid to those who apply after the deadline.)

Not surprisingly, the names on the survey this summer were generally not the nation's most selective schools (that's Wesleyan College, in Macon, Georgia, not the same-named Connecticut university the Massachusetts senior applied to). But the schools still accepting applications did include many strong state schools and new or small private institutions. In July the University of Pittsburgh, for example, had room for a small number of freshmen and transfer students, and also still had a little financial aid and housing available. Randolph-Macon College, in Virginia, was still looking for students, as was Lesley College, in Massachusetts. And although the flagship campuses of big-name state schools often fill up, the other campuses may still be in the hunt for students. This past year, for instance, the University of Massachusetts branches in Boston and Dartmouth and the University of Michigan branches in Flint and Dearborn were all on the list. Religious institutions such as the Catholic University of America, in Washington, D.C., and California Lutheran University, were on the list, as were more-specialized institutions such as the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and the Maryland College of Art and Design. Even four overseas institutions had responded.

But the NACAC list is not all-encompassing. Some schools don't advertise openings on the survey but admit that they will take a look at a late application if it sounds as though the student is at the higher end of their admissions range. Smith College, in Northampton, Massachusetts, is one example. Its admissions director, Audrey Smith, says she strives to keep her policies flexible, and that often there's enough shifting around in the entering class for the college to look at two or three late-admission prospects.

In such a situation both sides are under pressure to get results as quickly as possible; it suddenly becomes more acceptable and more productive for a counselor, or even a student, to call up an admissions office and discuss chances. A college counselor can provide thumbnail sketches of students: test scores, grade-point averages, main activities, distinctive traits. The admissions officer can generally tell the counselor whether the college is reviewing late applications—and whether a particular candidate's credentials are in the right ballpark.

An institution's willingness to consider late applications depends on its yield from the regular applicant pool—that is, how many commitments it has extracted from those

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already admitted. For instance, at Grinnell College, in Iowa, the admissions process this year was unusually competitive, and the yield was high. Jim Sumner, Grinnell's dean of admissions and financial aid, told me in July that he hadn't encouraged any late applications for the fall of 2003. But the previous year the yield was lower, and he was therefore willing to seriously consider late applications.

Grinnell is also part of the Associated Colleges of the Midwest, a fourteen-school group including Carleton, Macalester, and the University of Chicago, that has a referral program whereby students denied at one school are invited to apply to another. "It's an attempt to distribute the wealth," Sumner says. About twenty-five students apply through the referral program each year.

In other words, there is a safety net of sorts to catch those who get in nowhere in the spring. But these applicants could also have avoided the situation entirely—by applying to an appropriate safety school. The problem is that most schools—and certainly selective ones—are now receiving more applications than ever before, which makes it somewhat harder to assess which schools may be considered safeties. Counselors at Walt Whitman High School, in Bethesda, Maryland, say that they now advocate Towson University as a safety school for students to whom they would once have recommended the University of Maryland. Scott White, a counselor at Montclair High School, in

New Jersey, advises using internal school data to identify potential safeties: some high schools maintain records that show, for example, the average high school GPA for graduates who went on to attend specific colleges. This is "real data," White says, more reliable than the profiles colleges themselves publish, because it places college-specific statistics in the context of the student's own high school. (Of course, an enterprising student from a high school that doesn't keep such records could probably obtain them from colleges themselves.)

When she applied to college, the student from Massachusetts didn't fully understand the intricacies of the college process—in particular, the necessity of applying to a safety school. After receiving the last of her rejection letters, she and her family turned to the Internet and the NACAC space-availability survey, and identified Rutgers and Purdue as possibilities. Within a week of her application to Rutgers she was offered a place in the freshman class.

As the Massachusetts student learned, in the late-admission process the elaborate courting ritual of the admissions office is abandoned, revealing the barest bones of the system. But it's a system that still works, even in the eleventh hour. The memory of spring's rejections is no longer so painful. This past August the student moved to New Jersey and enrolled at Rutgers as part of the class of 2007. ▀

V.V. Ganeshanathan, formerly an editorial researcher at The Atlantic Monthly, is a graduate student in fiction at the Iowa Writers' Workshop and a freelance journalist.

WHAT MAKES A COLLEGE GOOD?

A new survey seeks to get beyond the well-publicized—and much criticized—college rankings and measure schools by how good a job they do of actually educating their students

BY NICHOLAS CONFESSORE

This fall some two million high school seniors will apply to one of the thousands of accredited colleges and universities in the United States. It will prove to be the most daunting, anxiety-inducing experience many of them have yet had. The fact that most colleges today are more selective than they were a decade ago has filled the college-admissions process with a sense of risk and scarcity—and that in turn has driven a steady increase in the number of schools to which seniors typically apply. Ever rising prices mean that a college education can be as expensive as a starter home. But instead of bricks and mortar one is buying something that is intangible and yet, seemingly at least, life-determining: among some parents there's a strong belief that failure to attend a name-brand school will cut their children off from a bright future. So students are under great pressure to find—and get into—the "right"

schools. With the average public school college counselor laboring under a workload of about 500 students, consumers of higher education must rely on word of mouth, on their impressions from college visits, on name recognition—and on some of the hundred or more college guides and rankings that are published each year, from the encyclopedic *Fiske Guide to Colleges* to the Princeton Review's *The Best 351 Colleges*.

The most widely read of these is *U.S. News & World Report's* "America's Best Colleges," a regular issue of the magazine that was first published in 1983 and today reaches an audience of nearly 11 million people. *U.S. News* pioneered and largely legitimated the idea of "objective" comparative measures of a school's quality—an idea that has come to permeate the higher-education culture. Colleges pay attention to rankings because a higher ranking one year can

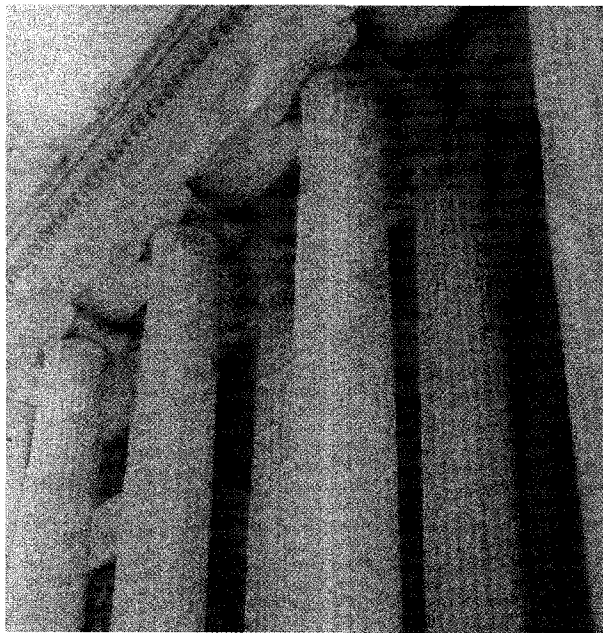
bring a flood of new applicants the next, whereas a lower ranking can cause a falloff. Prospective students and their parents pay attention because *U.S. News*-style rank seems a fair way to gauge whether a school would give them their money's worth. As Steve Goodman, a private education consultant based in Washington, D.C., told me recently, "They say, 'I'm willing to take a second mortgage out for a school I've heard about that I presume is of good quality, but not for one that I've never heard of that may or may not offer a quality education.'"

For education analysts, teachers, and a handful of outspoken university presidents, however, the growing influence of college rankings has for years been a source of deep concern. They believe that rankings not only have distorted the admissions process but are symptomatic of a broader corruption of American universities: administrators, they say, have reshaped their institutions to pursue goals that may not aid—in fact, may actively subvert—the purpose of higher education. Not until the 1990s, when college guides became a growth industry, did it really dawn on critics that college rankings were also providing kids and their parents with something desirable: reliable hard data that could be used to compare a wide array of schools and pick one out of the clutter. To reduce the relevance of one sort of ranking the critics would have to provide another: an alternative measure of educational quality based on a new standard to which institutions could aspire. They would, in other words, have to find a different way to answer the basic question faced by so many high school seniors and their families each year: What makes a college good?

Changes in the *U.S. News* ranking system since its origin twenty years ago suggest how powerful the demand for hard data about colleges has become. The first *U.S. News* ranking divided schools into broad categories and asked university presidents to rate the best schools within their peer group. That is, it was basically a popularity contest—or, as the magazine called it, a "reputational survey." Most colleges ignored the results, but the issue was snatched up from newsstands, and *U.S. News* published the rankings again in 1985 and 1987. The following year the magazine decided to launch them as an annual feature, bundled with stories about higher education and titled

"America's Best Colleges." To make the rankings less subjective, *U.S. News* also began to gather a wide variety of figures. For the past fifteen years the areas in which colleges are measured have remained roughly constant: along with peer assessment they include retention, which counts both a college's graduation rate and the percentage of freshmen who return the following year; faculty resources, including such statistics as student-faculty ratio and average faculty salaries; student selectivity, which factors in a school's acceptance rate along with the SAT or ACT scores and high school class ranks of the students who enroll; an institution's per-student spending; and the alumni-giving rate. Another measure, called graduation-rate performance (which compares a school's expected and actual graduation rates), was added in 1996.

All told, "America's Best Colleges" offers a wealth of factual, specific, and objective information about more than 1,400 colleges and universities—a nice departure from the bland, cheery, and vaguely propagandistic brochures and videos that most of those institutions send out through the mail. Until *U.S. News* began publishing the rankings, in fact, many schools didn't collect this kind of information systematically; and even if they did, few were willing to make it public. By creating an incentive for institutions to provide reliable data about graduation rates, selectivity, and the like, *U.S. News* has



helped to demystify the admissions process and to create a common vocabulary for parents, applicants, college counselors, and universities themselves. (Indeed, it's a testament to *U.S. News*'s influence that the Department of Education now actually mandates that schools report to the federal government much of the data that the magazine requires for its rankings.) Rankings can help many high school seniors gauge their chances with certain schools, and may even lead them to discover institutions that they or their overworked guidance counselors had never heard of. Brian Kelly, the magazine's executive editor, says that *U.S. News* "levels the playing field for a kid in El Paso, who's heard of Rice but never knew that his SAT scores were good enough to get into Amherst." Of all the college-guide publishers, *U.S. News* is arguably the one that collects data the most rigorously and is most open about how it arrives at its final numbers.

But for most critics of rankings, the integrity of the data

from *U.S. News* and its imitators is not the issue. What they object to is how colleges, along with students and parents, put the data to use. Kelly explains that the rankings are merely a “way for people to make a preliminary selection of schools they think might be appropriate for them.” However, although the magazine does take care to remind readers that the college experience “cannot be reduced to mere numbers,” it also insists that the statistics it provides are “widely accepted indicators of excellence.” According to critics, what *U.S. News*-style data actually measure is something different: an institution’s wealth in resources—from smart students to accomplished faculty members to large endowments. The logic is that “lots of resources, plus selective admissions, equals ‘excellence’ in undergraduate education,” as Ernest T. Pascarella, a professor and education researcher at the University of Iowa, wrote in one widely read 2001 critique, published in *Change* magazine. Rather than talking of America’s “Best Colleges,” he suggested, college rankings should be called “America’s Most Advantaged Colleges.”

The distinction may not seem immediately meaningful (if a school is more advantaged, isn’t my kid?), so it’s worth looking more closely at some of the specific measures. Take faculty resources, which for national universities and liberal-

the work to graduate students. Not surprisingly, Astin’s research shows that students at the larger and more elite institutions—that is, the institutions better able to lure high-priced academic talent—tend to have “less satisfaction with relationships with faculty and less satisfaction with teaching.” In other words, a university may well be rich in faculty resources and poor in actual teaching.

How about schools that are rich in talented students? Student selectivity counts for 15 percent of a school’s *U.S. News* rank, and to some extent this is justified. Broadly speaking, SAT or ACT scores and high school class rank—which account for most of this category—are together a good indicator of the academic ability of an incoming student. Other things being equal, educators say, it’s better to go to a school with lots of smart people—and a more selective school will generally provide a more enriching peer group than a less selective one. But a school’s selectivity does not necessarily reflect the quality of the education it offers. Research on learning shows that the highest-achieving students—the ones who have proved over a lifetime that they are “good at school”—will probably thrive intellectually regardless of how effective their school’s teachers are or how much money the school spends, so it’s hard to tease

***U.S. News* insists that its statistics are “widely accepted indicators of excellence.” But according to critics, what such data really measure is a school’s wealth in resources—from smart students to accomplished faculty members to large endowments.**

arts colleges account for 20 percent of an institution’s total score. (I’ve referred throughout to the 2003 edition.) Under the *U.S. News* formula a school that primarily hires full-time professors with the highest degrees in their fields and pays them handsomely scores above a school that relies more on lower-paid, part-time professors without the highest degrees. The thinking here seems plausible enough: the higher-paid professor is more likely than the lower-paid one to have an impressive curriculum vitae and be a good teacher, and a full-time professor has more time to teach and prepare for classes than a harried adjunct.

But in practice the things that make a professor well known in his field—published articles, groundbreaking research—must compete for his time and attention with teaching obligations. Few schools reward their faculty members for being good classroom teachers; it is universal, however, that a scholar’s prospects for tenure and other advancement suffer if he or she doesn’t publish frequently enough. Consequently, notes Alexander Astin, a widely respected scholar of learning and the longtime head of UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute, there’s actually “an inverse relationship between how much contact students have with faculty and how much professors publish.” In fact, famous professors may not teach much at all, leaving

out how much credit an institution deserves for its students’ college achievement. To use a medical analogy, judging the educational excellence of an institution that admits only high-achieving students is rather like judging the competence of a doctor who sees only robustly healthy patients.

How about schools that are rich, period? On the whole, such schools can spend more money on their students and score better in the “financial resources” category—which measures spending on things such as faculty salaries, libraries and other forms of academic support, and student counseling—than schools with tiny endowments. The catch is that a high level of per-student spending does not necessarily translate into, say, a high level of per-student learning. Just as a more highly paid faculty member may not be a better teacher, a more highly paid student counselor may not be a better adviser. It’s the difference between having a well-stocked library and knowing whether your students actually read a lot of books; that is, how often and how effectively do students use the resources provided? Researchers say that the existence of resources—library resources, lab resources, human resources—is a necessary but not, in and of itself, a sufficient condition for learning. “Donations and endowments and the like are a tremendous asset for institutions,” says Gary Pike, who runs the office of

institutional research at Mississippi State University. "But the link between that and the quality of a student's education is pretty tenuous."

Then, too, the schools that can spend the most per student are generally the ones that raise the most money. But a school's proficiency at "growing" its endowment or attracting grants does not automatically lead to better teaching and more learning. The alumni-giving rate, for example, is often used in rankings as a rough measure of how well a school meets the needs of its students: if the alumni donate to their alma mater at a high rate, the thinking goes, they must be pretty well satisfied with the education and services the school provided. But the opinion of people years or even decades past graduation day doesn't tell us much about how today's students are doing, and may well be more closely related to the football team's current win-loss record than to satisfaction with the educational experience. In practice the schools with the best alumni-giving rates are usually those with the most aggressive development offices. Princeton, which has the highest alumni-giving rate of any college in the country (64 percent, according to the 2003 rankings), is probably the only one that hosts annual reunions for every class and publishes an alumni magazine every other week during the school year. Although organized annual giving campaigns are common at elite private schools, they are less so at public universities or local colleges—and this may or may not reflect on the quality of the education offered by the latter institutions.

The fact that faculty, student, and financial resources don't necessarily correlate with high levels of learning also undercuts the most important of the *U.S. News* measures: peer assessment, which, at 25 percent, is the single largest component of a school's overall score. In contrast with the other elements of the ranking formula, peer assessment is purely subjective: university presidents, provosts, and admissions officers are simply asked to rate each school on a scale of 1 to 5. In one sense, then, rankings have merely made explicit the perceptions of prestige and quality that existed among educators long before anyone tried to record them. But it turns out that university officials tend to base their assessment of "reputation" on an institution's wealth in resources. Writing in *The Washington Monthly* two years ago, Nicholas Thompson, a journalist, and Amy

Graham, *U.S. News*'s former director of data research, found that a high reputation score in *U.S. News* correlated "much more closely with high per-faculty federal research and development expenditures than with high faculty-student ratios or good graduation-rate performance, the magazine's best measures of undergraduate learning."

On the whole, rich, prestigious, research-oriented universities are assumed, rightly or wrongly, to provide a better education than other schools. Therefore, university administrators, especially those at middle-tier schools looking to build a better reputation, are devoting increasing amounts of time and money to improving the things that build prestige, whether or not those things improve the educational experience of the undergraduates the institution is meant to serve. Department chairs work to lure well-known research scientists, because a "hot" department attracts other stars,

along with a bigger cut of research funding and talented graduate students. Financial-aid offices shift money from need-based to merit scholarships, hoping to tempt a few elite students to attend their institutions—thereby improving selectivity. (And a higher selectivity ranking tends to boost applications, raising next year's score even higher.) Some schools may even spend millions of dollars to build a more competitive athletics program. If the gamble pays off, they'll end up with a winning football team, which in turn can help



build a school's buzz, attract more applications, and inspire alumni to open their wallets. But a high-priced coach, a brand-new stadium, and a state-of-the-art weight room won't help students learn. "The pursuit of prestige is expensive and risky," the economists Charles A. Goldman, Susan M. Gates, and Dominic J. Brewer concluded in a landmark RAND Corporation study published in 2001. "A college may make large investments, often placing tremendous strain on its financial health, yet neglect the needs of undergraduate students and other 'customers' ... who don't contribute to its prestige."

For several years now there has been a strong consensus among top education researchers that many colleges, partly because of rankings, are focusing too little on what really matters—what goes on in the classroom. Russell Edgerton, who served as the president of the American Association of Higher Education for nineteen years and is

now the director of the Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning, recently summarized it for me this way: “We knew that who students were and where they went to college mattered less than what they did when they got there.” To put it in academic terms, much of what the rankings measure is “inputs,” or the resources that lay a foundation for a student’s education—things such as class size, per-student spending, and a student’s own achievement level. The closest the rankings come to gauging what happens *during* college is to measure a handful of “outputs”—that is, what comes out at the other end of the college experience. One example of this is graduation rate performance. But that category, which measures the effects of a college’s programs and policies on its students’ graduation rate, counts for only five percent of a school’s score, whereas input-related measures are worth almost half. In fairness, part of the reason that college guides focus so much on inputs is that measuring students’ experience once they get to college—especially inside the classroom—is a much subtler and more invasive process; and for many years the infrastructure and resources needed to do it simply didn’t exist. An internal critique, commissioned by *U.S. News* in 1997 and performed by the National Opinion Research Center, concluded

tively students use the resources at their disposal. Decades’ worth of research had suggested that certain behaviors promoted higher levels of engagement, and several studies published in the late 1980s and early 1990s had synthesized and distilled that research into a set of recommendations for specific institutional practices that would help encourage those behaviors. (Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini’s 1991 report *How College Affects Students*, for instance, reviewed more than 2,600 studies spanning twenty years.) But Edgerton and his group realized that to reform or replace existing rankings—notably *U.S. News*’s—they would have to surmount two practical challenges. One was to design a methodologically sound survey that would elicit reliable data about whether schools were engaged in the right practices, without costing much for those schools to take part in. The other challenge was to find enough money to launch the survey nationally—that is, to be as comprehensive about measuring learning as *U.S. News* already was about measuring resources. The first problem was solved through a pair of pilot projects led by Peter Ewell, an expert on institutional assessment, and conducted during the spring and fall of 1999, with help from experts in survey research. The second problem was solved by Pew, which

A school’s selectivity does not necessarily reflect the quality of the education it offers. Students who over a lifetime have proved that they are “good at school” will probably thrive intellectually regardless of how effective their professors are.

as much: although the magazine should find some way to measure “student experiences and curriculum,” the center reported, there was “no way in which such data could be collected at a scale that would be statistically defensible but not at the same time bankrupt *U.S. News*.”

It was in an effort to solve the difficulties of measuring students’ college experience that in February of 1998 Edgerton invited a dozen or so college presidents and leading education analysts to meet in Philadelphia. Soft-spoken, articulate, and widely respected within the higher-education community, Edgerton had long been concerned about what he calls “the ground rules of higher education”—the set of incentives, including but not limited to college rankings, that were driving colleges and universities to compete for prestige. During the following months his working group discussed how it could improve the existing rankings or, if that failed, create a new, more meaningful standard of quality. “We felt that if we could open up a new source of evidence,” he told me recently, “not about resources and reputation but about whether or not universities were using those resources to improve student learning, we could make something happen.”

There was already a vast empirical literature on “student engagement,” which, broadly speaking, means how effec-

awarded Indiana University’s Center for Postsecondary Planning and Research, headed by George Kuh, a \$3.3 million grant to get the project off the ground.

In 2000 Kuh and his staff launched what was dubbed the National Survey of Student Engagement. Research indicated that “engagement” could be reliably measured by surveying students themselves. So instead of being sent to college presidents, provosts, and admissions offices, NSSE (pronounced *Nessy*) is distributed to students. Part of the survey is devoted simply to finding out how often students perform certain tasks. NSSE asks how often students write papers and how long those papers are, so the answers reflect not only the overall amount that students are writing but also whether teachers at a school tend to assign one big paper at the end of a course or a series of shorter papers spread throughout the semester. It asks students how often they talk with faculty members inside and outside of class, and about what (grades? assignments? career plans?). And, yes, it asks how often students read books—not only for class but also “for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment.”

NSSE also questions students directly about particular services their institutions offer. Instead of simply measuring

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how much a school spends on advising, for instance, it asks students how much they benefit from it. In a similar vein, one set of questions asks whether students have done or plan to do certain things before graduation, such as take an internship, study abroad, or work on a research project with a professor; studies show that participation in one or more of them has a variety of desirable effects on engagement. Other questions relate to how students divide their week among different tasks. Not surprisingly, preparing for class, working on campus, and taking part in extracurricular activities all tend to improve engagement, whereas time spent working off campus, commuting, or caring for dependents does not. Certain parts of NSSE seek to delve into deeper kinds of engagement. One series of questions, for instance, measures what educators call “integration”—whether students are applying the knowledge they’ve learned. Students are asked how often they have worked on a paper or a project that required incorporating ideas or information from different sources; how often they’ve acknowledged diverse perspectives—different racial viewpoints, political beliefs, and so forth—in class discussions or writing assignments; and how often they’ve discussed ideas from readings or classes with people outside of class.

whether they would also do well on measures of engagement. A recent study by Gary Pike of fourteen research universities that *are* in the NSSE database found almost no correlation between the institutions’ scores on NSSE measures and their scores on *U.S. News*’s “indicators of excellence.”)

Part of what accounts for NSSE’s growth is that the survey is actually useful to schools. Taken together, the survey questions elicit information about five proven “benchmarks of effective educational practices”: how academically challenging a school is, how much students interact with faculty members, how supportive of learning the campus environment is, how well the institution promotes “active and collaborative learning,” and whether the school offers “enriching educational experiences.” Kuh and his team plug in a particular institution’s characteristics (its size, the academic ability of its incoming students, and the proportion who attend full time), to calculate how well it should do on those benchmarks, and provide schools with a report that grades them on how well they actually do. Schools that underperform in one area or another then have some sense of where they need to improve. Kuh also lets each institution pick a small group of other schools it considers peers;

The researchers behind the National Survey of Student Engagement realized that to reform or replace existing rankings they would have to be as comprehensive about measuring learning as *U.S. News* already was about measuring resources.

The more students do these things, the better they learn and the greater the likelihood that what they’re learning is transferable to other settings.

NSSE has caught on quickly. In the first year 276 institutions took part in the survey; this year the number was up to 431. NSSE encourages institutions to participate in the survey every few years. Today more than 730 schools, representing 58 percent of undergraduate enrollment at four-year institutions in the United States, are in the NSSE database. This year NSSE has surveyed about 150,000 students—by most standards an extraordinarily large sample size. (A major Gallup poll, by comparison, surveys about 5,000 people.) Schools taking part in the survey run the gamut from big to small, public to private, urban to suburban, selective to less selective. Even *U.S. News* has shown interest in the work of Kuh’s center. For last year’s edition of “America’s Best Colleges” the magazine published some NSSE data (provided by a small selection of schools) on its Web site and in a section of the spinoff college guide, under the title “Seniors Have Their Say.” The main holdouts, unsurprisingly, are the few dozen most selective and prestigious schools in the United States—that is, the ones that already do well on measures of reputation and resources. (Some of them no doubt worry about

NSSE then shoots back the aggregate scores of that peer group. (Some schools also swap their survey results directly.) The idea is to get schools to reorient themselves toward improvements that can make a measurable difference in the education of their undergraduates. “Comparing almost any institution against a national number isn’t very helpful,” Kuh says, “especially if you’re trying to mobilize a set of faculty members around thinking about how they might improve the undergraduate program.”

Although the vast majority of schools cannot easily improve their performance in terms of input measures (they can’t build endowments from scratch, or simply attract twice as many National Merit Scholars for next year’s freshman class), they *can* influence the experiences of their students. Among the several college presidents I spoke with about NSSE was Peter Smith, a higher-education veteran (and one-time member of Congress) who in 1994 helped to launch a branch of the California State University system in Monterey Bay. As schools go, CSUMB is relatively small, unselective, and unknown. “So when we started,” Smith told me recently, “one of the first questions we were faced with was ‘How is anyone going to know if you’re good?’” He saw NSSE as a way to answer that question, and when the survey was launched three years ago, he eagerly signed up.

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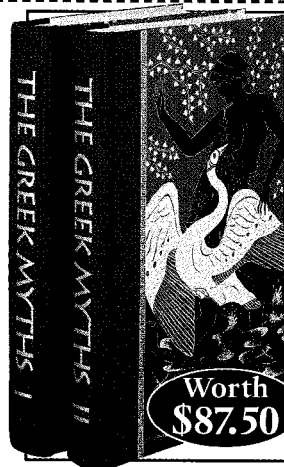
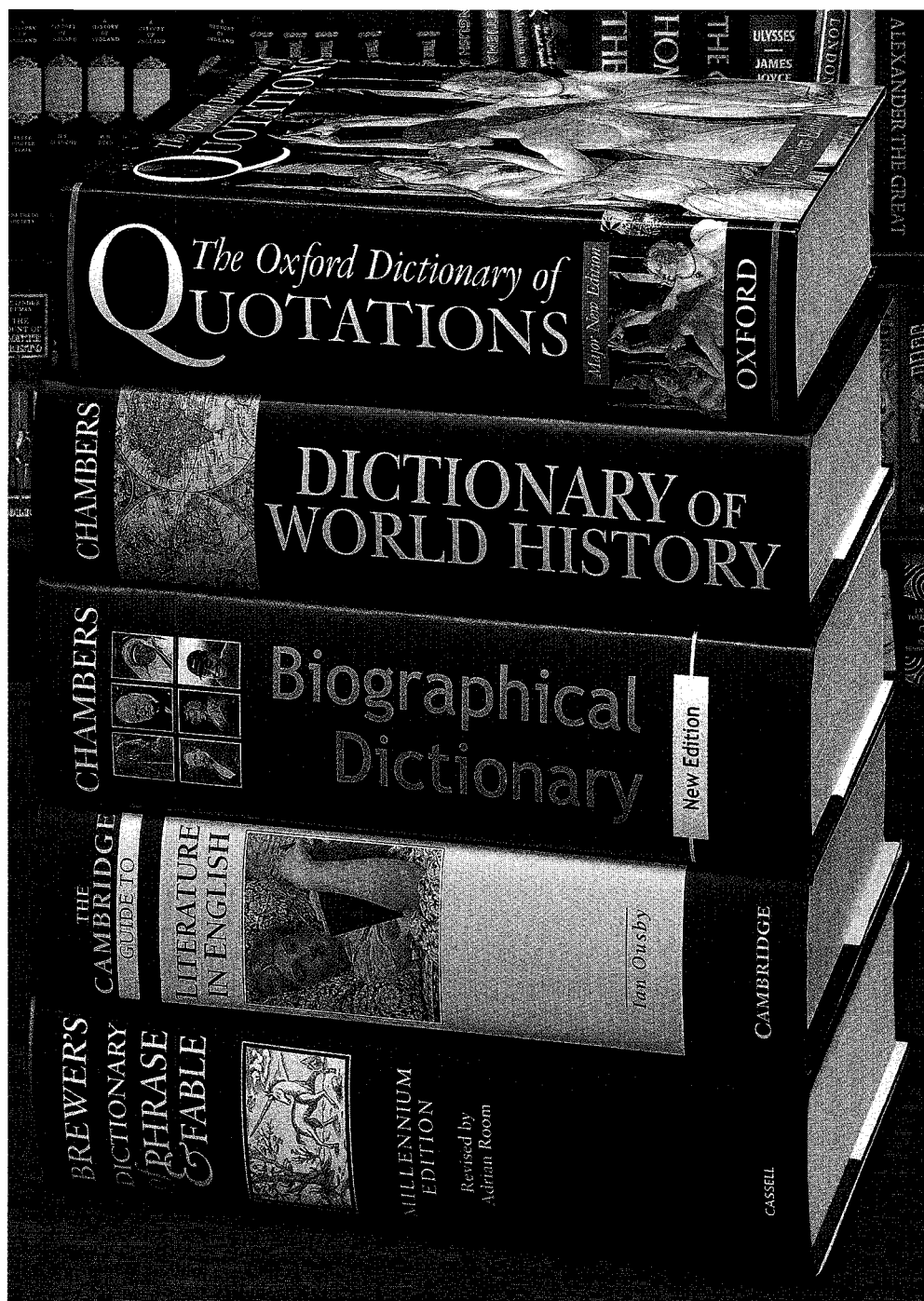
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Today, NSSE measures the school both against its own past performance and against other state universities in California, and the results have already helped Smith and his colleagues to identify areas needing improvement. One problem, they discovered, was the campus environment. Situated on a former military base, the college “looks like the set of *On the Beach* after the bomb dropped,” as Smith put it. “It’s a pretty lonely place.” So the school set out to improve its physical amenities; it has built an aquatic center and plans to knock down some of the abandoned and unused buildings that give the campus its ghost-town feel. The survey also confirmed something that administrators had suspected but weren’t previously able to measure: despite a generally challenging and rewarding academic environment, freshmen and sophomores weren’t connecting with those faculty members who would serve as advisers after the students declared a major. As a result students were having trouble making the transition from sophomore to junior year, and some were leaving school. These days, students must investigate various areas of study during their freshman year and plan a course of study that will qualify them for a major; during sophomore year everyone is assigned a major adviser to track his or her progress. “The single most important thing about the NSSE data,” Smith said, “is that it takes important elements of your operations and it gives you hard data, very clear information, about how you’re doing—removing it from hunch, opinion, and philosophy, all the lenses through which most conversations about higher education are conducted. It changes everything.” Today CSUMB is the rare college that actually posts its NSSE results on the Web. “Good news or bad, we want people to know it,” Smith said. “Because that’s going to spur us to do better.”

That said, NSSE isn’t perfect. The chief complaint—made by, among others, UCLA’s Alexander Astin, who sits on NSSE’s board as what he calls a “friendly critic”—is that the survey doesn’t really measure “added value.” NSSE is administered to the freshmen and seniors at a given institution in a given year, rather than longitudinally, to the same set of students over time. So although it does measure whether a school is generally doing the right things, it’s hard to tell from the results how much a school is helping students to learn. “NSSE is certainly a step above what *U.S. News* provides as far as what matters,” says Linda Sax, a UCLA professor who runs the nationwide College Freshman Survey. “It descriptively tells us how engaged students are at an institution. But it doesn’t allow us to assess institutional effectiveness. It doesn’t tell the whole story.” George Kuh and Peter Ewell both acknowledge that this is a drawback in NSSE’s approach, one that they hope to address over time. A NSSE-size survey done longitudi-

nally, they point out, would have been even harder to get off the ground, so they opted for something simpler, if less comprehensive.

A more practical drawback is that NSSE doesn’t make its results available to the public. Although the survey was originally conceived as the basis for an alternative to the rankings, schools proved unwilling to take part in it unless they alone could decide whether to reveal their results. This means that although it can be a useful self-improvement tool for institutions, applicants and parents don’t have access to NSSE data from most schools. Neither does *U.S. News*. For this fall’s edition only about seven percent of the schools rated by the magazine allowed it to use their NSSE data—which is one reason why “America’s Best Colleges” doesn’t integrate the survey data into the rankings proper. And *U.S. News* uses what NSSE data it does get from colleges only sparingly: of the ninety-plus questions on the survey, the 2003 college guide included responses to fifteen.

Still, there is a way for college applicants and their parents to become familiar with the kinds of information NSSE is designed to measure. They can, for instance, ask admissions offices and campus tour guides the same kinds of questions that Kuh and his team put to institutions as a whole: How much contact do students have with professors? How often do they write papers? How do students receive help selecting classes? What do students like about the campus? How many undergraduates study abroad? (The survey helpfully publishes a pocket-guide checklist of questions to ask while visiting campuses.) As schools begin to sense a demand from their customers for NSSE-type information, they’ll feel pressure to start providing it. Indeed, a similar sort of process is already under way within the higher-education community. A growing number of accreditation organizations now encourage schools to take part in surveys like NSSE and report back the results; likewise, state university systems have begun to use NSSE to assess their constituent schools. Over time, as its influence grows, the survey can become what Edgerton calls a tool of “soft accountability,” pushing schools to cultivate practices that are known to improve education.

Kuh and his colleagues may never get elite schools to participate in NSSE. But in a certain sense they don’t really need to. Whereas the smartest, highest-ability students are not all that dependent on institutions to get them to learn, colleges can make a great difference for students of average or lower academic ability. Inevitably, the vast majority of such students will attend institutions lacking the prestige and wealth of a Harvard or a Yale. But if NSSE succeeds, those students will not lack for a good education. ▀

Nicholas Confessore is an editor of The Washington Monthly and a senior correspondent for The American Prospect.



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Look at the data closely, and the neat hierarchy of selectivity begins to fall apart

BY DON PECK

Of the many statistics publicized by universities and the college guides that evaluate them, few receive as much attention as those that measure the difficulty of admission. "Selectivity" data—ranging from simple admission rates to statistical profiles of the academic achievement of each school's freshman class—would seem to be useful enough: they provide students with a quick notion of whether their credentials might be a good match for any given school. But these statistics also have an almost fetishistic appeal, as if the more students a school turns away, the nobler the character of the few it admits.

How much does a school's selectivity reveal about the quality of the school or of the students who attend it? Does selectivity mean much of anything at all?

By way of experiment, *The Atlantic* gathered data on America's most selective schools and created a ranking of the top fifty. The ranking is derived entirely from three variables that college admissions officers commonly say are most indicative of a school's competitiveness: the school's admission rate, and the SAT scores and high school class rank of matriculating freshmen. For the purposes of this illustration the variables were weighted equally to produce a rank for each school for 2002 and certain previous years as well.

A cursory examination reveals a few surprises (the Coast Guard Academy makes the list, whereas West Point does not), but only a few. (And in fairness to West Point, it just missed the list, ranking fifty-fifth.) Generally, the expected schools are in more or less the expected places. The "Big Three" Ivies, plus MIT, Caltech, and Stanford, stand at the summit; they are followed in the top twenty by other Ivies, the "Little Ivies" (Swarthmore, Amherst, Williams), and a few other schools.

Perhaps the most fundamental myth of selectivity is that those admitted to a school somehow represent the apex of the applicant group—that they are the best of the best. In truth, many elite schools could fill their classes twice over from the pool of rejected applicants and suffer no decline in quality. Emory's admissions dean estimates that between 50 and 60 percent of the applicants that Emory rejected last year were statistically as strong as those offered admission. The students on Duke's waiting list typically have better SATs and higher class ranks than the students who end up enrolling. Swarthmore this year rejected 62 percent of applicants with an 800 verbal SAT score and 58 percent of those with an 800 math score. Last year Notre Dame rejected 39 percent of the high school valedictorians who applied.

The neat hierarchy of selectivity begins to fall apart in other ways when one looks more closely, and considers ap-

plicants as what they are: individuals with different characteristics, applying at different times. Take sex. Overall, MIT is No. 1 among the top fifty selective schools, and Swarthmore is No. 10. Yet a woman applying to both schools would find Swarthmore considerably harder to get into than MIT. (This is because MIT, like many schools of technology, needs to work hard to get women into its classes.) On the whole, though, a plurality of elite schools are slightly more selective with regard to women than to men, simply because women have come to outnumber men in applicant pools.

Selectivity also varies according to when one applies—that is, whether through a school's early-decision program or during the regular admissions season. At the top schools in particular it is not unusual for early-decision applicants to be accepted at a rate two or three times that for regular-season applicants. At Princeton only eight percent of the candidates who applied during the regular admissions cycle in 2001 were accepted, but 31 percent of those who applied through the school's early-decision program were accepted—an admission rate closer to that of USC or Boston College than of MIT or Harvard. Schools sometimes claim that their early-decision candidate pools are typically stronger than their regular-admissions pools, so one should expect some difference in the admission rates. But a recent study of fourteen highly selective schools by researchers at Harvard determined that on average, early-decision candidates had slightly lower SAT scores and class ranks than candidates who applied during the regular admissions season. The same study found that by applying early, students improved their chances of admission to a school by about as much as they would have if they'd scored 100 points higher on the SAT.

The fact is, neither selectivity rankings nor aggregate statistics for any school can really tell candidates with any degree of precision the likelihood that they will be admitted. Owing to many factors other than the ones cited above, including the desire to admit athletes of a certain caliber, to admit the children of alumni, and to have diverse student bodies, the selectivity of the very top schools is highly uneven. That unevenness—the different standards applied to different types of candidates being evaluated by any single school on this list—may well swamp any differences among schools' overall selectivity scores.

If what the rankings conceal is telling, so, too, is how they change over time—or, rather, how they fail to change. (When enduring change does occur, the explanation may be cultural and reflect nothing about a school's inherent quality. America's urban renaissance, for instance, which has



A SELECTIVITY DATABASE

2002 RANK	NAME OF SCHOOL (YEAR FOUNDED)	2002 ADMIT RATE	2002 EARLY- DECISION ADMIT RATE	2002 MALE ADMIT RATE	2002 FEMALE ADMIT RATE	2002 SAT 25TH PERCENTILE	2002 SAT 75TH PERCENTILE	2002 TOP 10% H.S. CLASS	2001 RANK
1	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1861)	16%		12%	28%	1420	1660	99%	2
2	Princeton University (1746)	11%	31%	10%	11%	1380	1560	95%	3
3	California Institute of Technology (1891)	21%		19%	31%	1470	1580	99%	1
4	Yale University (1701)	13%	26%	13%	13%	1370	1560	95%	5
5	Harvard University (1636)	11%		11%	10%	1400	1570	90%	4
6	Stanford University (1891)	13%	23%	13%	13%	1350	1540	88%	6
7	Columbia University (1754)	12%	31%	13%	10%	1320	1510	84%	7
8	University of Pennsylvania (1740)	21%	39%	20%	22%	1330	1500	91%	9
9	Brown University (1764)	17%	27%	18%	16%	1290	1500	87%	8
10	Swarthmore College (1864)	24%	43%	28%	21%	1350	1530	90%	11
11	Washington University in St. Louis (1853)	24%		25%	22%	1310	1480	90%	13
12	Amherst College (1821)	18%	36%	18%	18%	1310	1540	82%	12
13	University of California at Berkeley (1868)	25%				1180	1440	98%	10
14	Duke University (1838)	25%	32%	25%	24%	1320	1510	89%	16
15	Dartmouth College (1769)	23%	33%	21%	24%	1330	1520	86%	14
16	Pomona College (1887)	23%	33%	27%	20%	1340	1510	84%	20
17	University of California at Los Angeles (1919)	24%		23%	25%	1140	1390	97%	18
18	Rice University (1912)	24%	32%	24%	24%	1320	1520	83%	15
19	Williams College (1793)	23%	39%	21%	24%	1320	1510	82%	19
20	Georgetown University (1789)	21%		22%	21%	1280	1450	80%	21
21	Cornell University (1865)	29%	43%	28%	30%	1280	1470	83%	22
22	Claremont McKenna College (1946)	28%	31%	29%	27%	1280	1460	82%	24
23	Harvey Mudd College (1955)	37%	50%	29%	61%	1390	1540	83%	17
24	The College of William and Mary (1693)	35%	54%	43%	30%	1250	1440	90%	33
25	Middlebury College (1800)	27%	27%	29%	26%	1350	1490	74%	25
26	Northwestern University (1851)	33%	53%	34%	32%	1300	1480	82%	26
27	Emory University (1836)	42%	61%	41%	43%	1300	1460	90%	27
28	Washington and Lee University (1749)	31%	55%	32%	30%	1280	1440	80%	37
29	Haverford College (1833)	32%	55%	33%	32%	1280	1460	80%	29
30	University of California at San Diego (1959)	41%				1170	1370	97%	28
31	University of Notre Dame (1842)	34%		34%	34%	1270	1450	82%	30
32	Bowdoin College (1794)	25%	28%	23%	26%	1280	1450	72%	23
33	University of Southern California (1880)	30%		31%	30%	1240	1420	80%	32
34	Barnard College (1889)	34%	45%		34%	1250	1410	84%	35
35	Wesleyan University (1831)	28%	44%	30%	27%	1290	1470	73%	31
36	Tufts University (1852)	27%	43%	28%	26%	1250	1430	72%	41
37	Davidson College (1837)	34%	58%	35%	34%	1250	1440	79%	43
38	University of Virginia (1819)	39%	40%	39%	39%	1220	1420	84%	38
39	University of Chicago (1891)	42%				1310	1500	78%	40
40	New York University (1831)	28%	39%	27%	29%	1250	1430	70%	39
41	Johns Hopkins University (1876)	35%	60%			1280	1490	72%	34
42	Carleton College (1866)	35%	55%	36%	34%	1280	1460	70%	45
43	Carnegie Mellon University (1900)	38%	49%	33%	47%	1270	1470	72%	36
44	United States Air Force Academy (1954)	17%		18%	14%	1210	1380	57%	44
45	Vassar College (1861)	31%	50%	39%	28%	1270	1430	65%	50
46	Bates College (1855)	28%	38%	29%	27%	1260	1430	62%	55
47	United States Coast Guard Academy (1876)	8%		8%	8%	1190	1350	48%	N/A
48	United States Naval Academy (1845)	12%		12%	10%	1090	1310	57%	42
49	Boston College (1863)	34%		35%	32%	1220	1400	69%	49
50	Colgate University (1819)	34%	49%	31%	36%	1240	1400	68%	57

RANKED ACCORDING TO STUDENT ADMISSION RATES, SAT PERCENTILES, AND HIGH SCHOOL CLASS STANDING FOR THE FRESHMAN CLASS MATRICULATING IN THE FALL OF 2002. THE POOL INCLUDED U.S. DOCTORAL UNIVERSITIES, LIBERAL-ARTS COLLEGES, AND SERVICE ACADEMIES.

made city schools more attractive to students, might lie behind the steady rise of Columbia and Penn and the slow fall-off by Dartmouth and Cornell.) One of the more striking characteristics of the top-fifty list is how chronological it turns out to be. That is, one good predictor of a school's selectivity rank is nothing more complicated than the date of its founding. The average founding years of the top five, ten, twenty-five, fifty, and 100 most selective schools in the nation are 1767, 1785, 1822, 1839, and 1850, respectively. Eight of the first ten schools established in the United States are today among the nation's fifty most selective schools. Of the 128 doctoral universities, liberal-arts colleges, and service academies founded in the whole of the past century, only six can make the same claim. For all the talk of "hot" and "cold" schools, it is difficult to think of another industry in which historical legacy carries as much weight, or brand image appears as immutable. All but nine of the top fifty schools in 1992 are still in the top fifty today; and only four schools have broken in or out of the top twenty-five during the same period. By comparison, the top fifty companies in *Forbes's* 2002 ranking of the nation's largest companies are significantly different from the fifty that topped the 1992 list. (Twelve companies were acquired in the intervening years. And thirteen—more than one third

of the remainder—have fallen off the list.) Against the backdrop of an economic culture built around competition and creative destruction, the hierarchy of elite schools appears curiously frozen in time.

And yet, at least in economic terms, a brand-name education appears to mean less than people think. In a 1999 study conducted for the National Bureau of Economic Research, Alan B. Krueger and Stacy Berg Dale showed that the selectivity of the schools students attended—given students of similar background and aptitude—made little difference in terms of their later earnings. Specifically, Krueger and Dale compared people who had attended highly selective schools with people who had gotten into comparable schools but had chosen less selective ones. They found that those in the former group earned no more than those in the latter.

Still, there is something inherently attractive about trying to rate schools based on their selectivity. Such a rating seems to provide clarity. But the clarity is an illusion. There may be good reasons for an individual student to prefer Harvard, the fifth school on this list, to Colgate, the fiftieth. But the fact that Harvard (on average) is harder to get into should not be predominant among them. ▀

Don Peck is the director of The Atlantic's editorial-research staff.

THE BIAS QUESTION

In a surprising challenge to the SAT's reputation as an unbiased measure of student learning, one researcher has argued that blacks do better than matched-ability whites on the harder questions of the SAT—something he believes their scores should reflect

BY JAY MATHEWS

When the telephone rang in the kitchen of his townhouse in Lambertville, New Jersey, one morning last April, Roy O. Freedle had just taken his blood-pressure medicine. That was good, he thought later, because it turned out to be a stressful conversation. The caller was Drew Gitomer, the senior vice-president for research and development at the Educational Testing Service, where Freedle had worked for more than thirty years as a research psychologist, before retiring in 1998. The two men were of different generations—Gitomer was forty-six and Freedle was sixty-nine. They had not known each other well when Freedle was still at ETS, but the older man had a good idea why the younger man was calling.

Just a few days before, a long article by Freedle had appeared in the *Harvard Educational Review* arguing that the most important test in America, the SAT, was racially biased. Previous work on bias in the SAT, he wrote, had failed to point out that African-Americans were doing bet-

ter on *harder* questions of the test than non-Hispanic whites with the same SAT scores. Minority students, along with culturally deprived whites with similarly hidden abilities, he argued, should have an assessment of their previously undiscovered talents shown to colleges so that they could get fairer decisions from admissions committees. Because ETS and its New York-based client the College Board had given birth to the SAT, still depended on it for much of their income, and spent considerable time and energy trying to keep biased questions out of the exam, Gitomer was none too pleased by Freedle's argument.

The SAT I, called the Reasoning Test by the College Board, is a three-hour, mostly multiple-choice test of verbal and mathematical knowledge and skills. In its three quarters of a century as a college-entrance examination it has become a giant; more than 2.2 million students took the test in the 2001–2002 school year, some more than once. Nearly as many people last year took the ACT, the SAT's Iowa-based

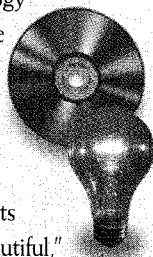
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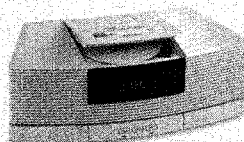
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rival, but the SAT gets more attention because it is the prevalent college-admissions test in the major government, financial, and media centers of the East and West Coasts. A revised version of the SAT, to be introduced in March of 2005, will add grammar questions and a written essay, replace quantitative comparisons with second-year algebra questions, and replace analogies with more reading questions.

Plenty of Americans, particularly those familiar with the subtlest forms of ethnic prejudice, think there is something wrong with the SAT, and with other standardized tests. For the high school class of 2002 the average score for a non-Hispanic white student on the 1600-point test was 1060. The average score for a black student was 857, or 203 points lower. (For Asians the average was 1070, and for Hispanics it was slightly over 900.) The gap between blacks and whites on the test is sixteen points greater today than it was in 1992.

If minority students are at a disadvantage in taking the SAT, their choice of colleges will be significantly limited, with important implications for their financial, professional, and social futures. In other words, the SAT is interfering with the pursuit of happiness—a problem that has long absorbed the efforts of education researchers and civil-rights lawyers, with not nearly as much progress as anyone would like.

point of view.” The first prominent case involving the issue of racial bias in testing arose later, and dealt not with college-entrance tests but with employment exams. In 1963 the Illinois Fair Employment Practices Commission ordered a Motorola television factory in Chicago to hire a young African-American who had been denied a job because of his score on an IQ test. ETS and others had been promoting tests in hiring decisions, Lemann wrote, but it never occurred to them that the results would be used to systematically exclude members of minorities. The Motorola case had a profound effect, especially on the debate over the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Senator John Tower, of Texas, inserted an amendment into the act specifically permitting the use of ability tests in employment. “Thus did standardized testing become a part of a landmark law in American history,” Lemann wrote.

At about the same time, civil-rights activists, legislators, judges, and educators began using the term “affirmative action” to justify offering opportunities to minority members who otherwise would not have seemed qualified. In the 1960s and 1970s colleges and universities that had more applicants than spaces began to give preference to some minority students who had lower test scores than whites but whose high school grades and personal

The difficulty of closing the racial test-score gap began to dawn on American policymakers in the mid twentieth century, just as the SAT was becoming the arbiter of which young people would get ahead academically and which would not.

Freedle’s accusation of racial bias in the SAT is striking because it is one of the few ever to come from an experienced ETS professional. Perhaps more important, it has caught the attention of the University of California (a powerful malcontent in the College Board family), which has ordered its own detailed analysis of the issue, due to be completed in 2004. Even if Freedle is ultimately proved wrong, his success at raising doubts about the SAT shows how loose a grip the test has on the political and scientific handholds that keep it upright.

In his book *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy* (1999), Nicholas Lemann described how the existence of the racial test-score gap and the difficulty of closing it began to dawn on American policymakers in the mid twentieth century, just as the SAT was becoming the arbiter of which young people would get ahead, at least academically, and which would not. One of the first warnings had to do with socioeconomic bias rather than specifically racial bias. Lemann found an item in the diary of Henry Chauncey, the first president of ETS, showing that he had read an article in the April 1948 issue of *The Scientific Monthly* arguing that tests like the SAT could be biased against low-income students. But Chauncey dismissed it as a “radical

qualities suggested that they would benefit from a demanding academic environment.

This form of affirmative action was buttressed by the 1978 Supreme Court case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*. The Court ruled 5–4 against the quota system used by the university’s medical school, whereby sixteen places out of a hundred in each entering class were reserved for minority students. However, Justice Lewis F. Powell wrote in his opinion that race could be considered in admissions decisions.

Shortly thereafter the College Board set up a fairness-review process that subjected every potential SAT question to close examination for racial stereotypes, loaded words, inappropriate assumptions, or anything else that might put minority students at a disadvantage. Questions dealing with subjects beyond the experience of a typical inner-city student, such as yachting or debutante balls, were thrown out. The College Board, together with ETS, also produced studies showing that the SAT was doing its job and did not make minority academic skills look any worse than they were. The data demonstrated that the SAT predicted about as well as high school grades how a student would do in his or her first year of college. And since selective schools did not want to admit applicants who could not meet their

standards, and since they had to have some defensible way to sort applicants whose relative academic merits were sometimes hard to quantify, the SAT—and the ACT—not only survived the occasional assaults on their methodology but continued to grow.

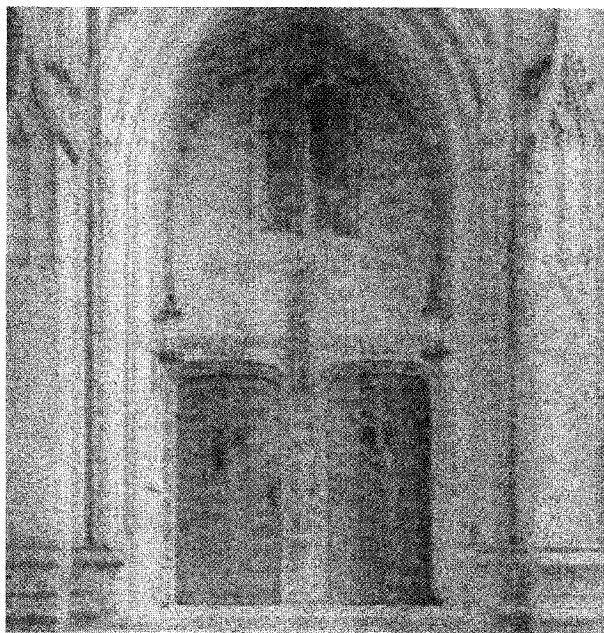
Inside ETS, in 1990, the senior scholar Winton Manning thought he had found a way of partly addressing the SAT's racial gap with his invention of the MAT, the Measure of Academic Talent. It was designed, in part, to give minority students a boost by identifying those whose SAT scores were higher than would be expected from their families' incomes and educational backgrounds. The idea died because of technical deficiencies and what Lemann described as fear among ETS executives about the commercial consequences of the corollary effect: adjusting downward the scores of affluent students who had not done as well as their backgrounds predicted. A group within ETS later proposed a version of the MAT called "Strivers," but this also received little support. In recent years the College Board has supported research, by the Yale psychologist Robert Sternberg and others, into alternative tests, of creative and practical skills. Sternberg said that his initial results produced smaller ethnic test-score gaps than the SAT, but he acknowledged that his test still needed years of work.

In the late 1990s SAT critics hailed the experiments of the Stanford psychologist Claude M. Steele, who had found a factor he called "stereotype threat" that seemed to explain lower scores by even successful black students. (See "Thin Ice: 'Stereotype Threat' and Black College Students," in the August 1999 *Atlantic*.) Steele tested black Stanford undergraduates, in some cases telling them that the results would be used to assess their verbal ability, and in other cases stressing that ability was not what was being tested. Scores were significantly lower when test takers thought their verbal ability—and therefore their intellectual ability—was being assessed. Steele argued that the students were reacting to the pressure of feeling they had to disprove negative stereotypes of African-Americans' intellectual ability, and that this at least partly explained the achievement gap.

The continuing debate over the worthiness of the SAT did have an effect on higher-education admissions policies. Some colleges, such as Muhlenberg, in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and Bowdoin, in Brunswick, Maine, began to market

themselves as places where students did not need the SAT to apply. In the 1990s the National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest), based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, began to compile a list—now nearing the 400 mark—of schools that do not require either the SAT or the ACT, or require them only from applicants who do not meet other criteria. Most selective colleges, however, remained committed to the tests.

Standardized testing was recently scrutinized in a suit against the University of Michigan, whose undergraduate admissions process used a point system that awarded significant points for being a member of a minority group. In 1997 two applicants sought to overturn Michigan's system after being rejected despite having higher ACT scores than some minority students who were accepted. FairTest and other groups argued in amicus curiae briefs that any decision relying heavily on the ACT or the SAT as a valid admissions



factor would be wrong. Indeed, according to the FairTest brief, which focused on the SAT, the test was not even a good predictor of first-year college grades; high school records, FairTest said, were a significantly more accurate gauge of college performance. (The College Board and ETS have maintained that either SAT scores or grades are better predictors than any alternatives, and recommended that colleges continue using them in combination.) Last summer the Supreme Court ruled that although diversity was a legitimate goal, the point system

was not an acceptable means of achieving it. Under this ruling schools may still use affirmative action, as long as the admissions process evaluates each applicant individually and not by a point formula. In practical terms this means that the college-admissions process, at least as it relates to affirmative action, can go on much as it has for the past forty years or so: selective colleges will continue to accept minority students with test scores below those of some rejected white applicants in order to maintain campus diversity, but most will also continue to use the SAT and the ACT, despite their imperfections, to help in evaluating applicants.

Freedle's attack on the SAT came at a time when ETS and the College Board thought the scholarly debate over the fairness of the test had been settled. The gap between blacks' and whites' performance on the SAT was clear. The blame, they thought, should be placed not on the test but on differences in family income and cul-

ture—and on K–12 school policies infected by lingering racism. Many middle-class black and Hispanic families were new to affluence and higher education, and on average, some researchers argued, were not quite as middle-class as their white neighbors. That meant that their children were still at a disadvantage in an academic setting, and only more time and better schooling would close the gap. Furthermore, high schools appeared to be putting minority students in less challenging classes out of a misplaced concern, fed by old stereotypes, that the students would not be able to handle the demands of honors and Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses.

“It is not bias in the tests,” Wayne Camara, the vice-president of research and development for the College Board, said in an interview with me this spring. “It is the differences in the opportunities the students have to get a quality education, the kinds of support they have in school and in the community and in the home.” The College Board’s president, Gaston Caperton, agrees. “If this is a bad test, I wouldn’t have taken this job. Wayne wouldn’t have come to work here. No college president would have used these tests, which they have for years and years, if it were a bad test. None of us would be part of it.”

Freedle found that black students do worse on questions containing common words—which may have different meanings for different groups—than on questions that depend on the harder words they study at school.

Freedle more or less accepted the view that the SAT was a useful measuring tool, but he believed the test had a flaw that could be corrected. He first became interested in the SAT for the same reason many people do. He saw himself as one of those whose lives were changed by higher education. His father was a tool-and-die maker. His mother was a waitress. He grew up in the Chicago area and majored in psychology and biology at Roosevelt University while working in the mailrooms of Marshall Field’s and the Universal Atlas Cement Company. At Columbia, where he earned his doctorate in experimental psychology in 1964, he supported himself with typing jobs and work in the architecture-department office. He was the first person in his family to go to college, much less graduate school.

At Columbia he became interested in how the structure of language in passages heard or read influenced thought and perception. He worked briefly at a Washington research firm after getting his doctorate. Then, in 1967, the eminent cognitive psychologist John B. Carroll lured him to ETS. Freedle enjoyed years of pure research on short-term memory, but when grants for such work became hard to get, he was happy to try his hand at more-practical projects.

He began to analyze questions on the Test of English as a Foreign Language, an exam for students from abroad who

want to qualify for places at American universities. He found that by analyzing various linguistic aspects of the questions—word order, word placement, interrogative style—he could predict which ones test takers in Seoul or Shanghai or Sarajevo would find easy and which would make them chew their pencils and look at the clock.

Freedle identified seven factors that seemed to affect the difficulty of a test question. One of the most common was simple word repetition. If an answer had a word in it that also appeared in the question, more test takers chose it; thus a question was easier if it contained a word that recurred in the correct answer, and harder if it contained a word that recurred in an incorrect answer. In reading-comprehension questions another factor was where in a reading passage the key part appeared. If it was at the beginning or the end of the passage, the question was easier than if it was in the middle.

Then he decided he would apply his analysis to ETS’s biggest test. He realized that if he looked at how different ethnic groups reacted to the seven factors, he might help to improve the SAT and impress his supervisors, who indicated that rooting out bias in the test was a priority.

Freedle was excited by a new technique called differen-

tial item functioning, or DIF (pronounced *diff*). To see which questions on the verbal section of the SAT produced different results by race, test takers were first divided into groups by score: those who had scored 200, the lowest possible; those who had scored 210; those who had scored 220; and on up to 800, the top score. Each of those scoring groups were examined to see how people of different ethnicities had done on each item of the test.

Using DIF, Freedle began to notice some intriguing results, which turned out to have more to do with word choice than with the seven difficulty factors. At each level of ability, but particularly in the lower-scoring groups, white students on average did better than blacks on the easier items, whereas blacks on average did better than whites on the harder ones. (Whites, though, did better overall.)

That was not a result that Freedle’s supervisors expected. In 1987 he handed in a draft of a report on the subject that he had done with Irene Kostin, an ETS colleague. The research-division chiefs asked for a revision. He handed in a second draft. They were still not satisfied. Some of the questions were legitimate, Freedle thought. His conclusions contradicted other research. The chiefs wanted him to look at the data from other angles. But each re-examination confirmed the initial results. By the time he was ordered to

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do an eleventh revision, Freedle had begun to wonder if ETS, in its scholarly way, was trying to discourage him from pursuing his rogue conclusion.

The report was eventually accepted, but his requests to do follow-up research were politely rejected. (A similar topic was assigned to other researchers, who did not get far with it.) He could have made a ruckus. Other ETS researchers had when they thought their best efforts were being buried. But Freedle just wanted to keep working, so he concentrated on his techniques for predicting the difficulty of items, which he knew interested the company. Over the next few years he wrote several reports on the subject. But by the late 1990s all his research proposals were being turned down. Others at ETS were also having a hard time getting projects approved, he says, but he thinks his supervisors had a particular problem with his work.

So in October of 1998 Freedle retired, taking with him much of his old data. He wanted to pursue on his own something that had popped out of his ETS work. On average, black students were performing only slightly above matched-ability whites on the hard questions—but averages did not submit applications to colleges; individual students did. When he broke the data down to specific cases, he found that many minority students got a boost of a hundred points or more on the SAT if the score was weighted toward the hard items.

Working from his townhouse, Freedle could no longer dip whenever he wanted to into the deep well of College Board SAT results. The provocative paper he had in mind could not be published in any peer-reviewed journal, because he did not have the statistical backup. But still he thought the idea was sound. He sent a thick sheaf of pages to the *Harvard Educational Review*. The editors whittled it down in time for the spring 2003 issue and titled it “Correcting the SAT’s Ethnic and Social-Class Bias: A Method for Reestimating SAT Scores.” (Freedle’s analysis focused on comparing the test results of non-Hispanic whites with those of African-Americans, though he argued that it could be more widely applied, to the disadvantaged of all ethnic groups.)

In the article Freedle proposed a supplement to SAT scores, called the Revised-SAT, or R-SAT, which would be calculated based only on the hard items. By putting more emphasis on the results for the harder test questions, Freedle argued, the supplement would “greatly increase the number of high-scoring minority individuals.” His late-1980s research with Kostin had revealed, using the DIF method, “evidence of an unintended but persistent cultural and statistical bias in the verbal section of the SAT that adversely affects African Americans,” he wrote.

It should be noted from the outset that virtually all these DIF item effects are typically small. For example, White students may get 84 percent correct on some *easy* items, while African Americans get a slightly lower number, say 82

percent, correct for the same item. Conversely, for some particular *hard* items, White students may get 30 percent correct whereas African Americans might get a slightly higher score, say 31 percent correct. What is unusual about these effects is their highly patterned nature; that is, many *easy* items show a small but persistent effect of African Americans’ underperformance, while many *hard* items show their overperformance ...

A culturally based interpretation helps explain why African American examinees (and other minorities) often do better on many *hard* verbal items but do worse than matched-ability Whites on many *easy* items. To begin with, *easy* analogy items tend to contain high-frequency vocabulary words while *hard* analogy items tend to contain low-frequency vocabulary words ... For example, words such as “horse,” “snake,” “canoe,” and “golf” have appeared in several *easy* analogy items. These are words used frequently in everyday conversations. By contrast, words such as “vehement,” “anathema,” “sycophant,” and “intractable” are words that have appeared in *hard* analogy items, and do not appear in everyday conversation ... However, they are likely to occur in school-related contexts or in textbooks.

Common words, Freedle explained, “often have many more semantic (dictionary) senses than rare words,” so there’s more of a chance that people’s cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds will affect their interpretations of those words. (In a 1990 study Freedle and Kostin reported that “fifteen high-frequency analogy words ... had an average of 5.2 dictionary entries, whereas rare analogy words ... had an average of only 2.0 dictionary entries.”) Thus words that are frequently used in the middle-class neighborhoods of the SAT makers may have a different meaning in underprivileged minority neighborhoods. This, Freedle continued, could help explain why African-American students do worse on questions containing those common words than on questions that depend on the harder (but less ambiguous) words they study at school. He found that this effect was most pronounced on those questions—sentence completions, analogies—that provided little or no context.

Although Freedle’s analysis concentrated on the verbal section of the SAT, he argued that the difficulty-bias effect extended to the math section, and perhaps even to essay questions such as those found on AP exams. He cited research showing minority students doing better than non-Hispanic whites on harder math items, which he attributed to the fact that those items used more textbooklike language and “more abstract concepts learned strictly in the classroom.” Minority students scored worse on the easier math items, just as they did on easier verbal items, because commoner words were used in those questions. Freedle said that an examination of essay test results showed a somewhat similar effect, whereby minority students scored better on harder topics than they did on easier ones.

He believed that a supplemental SAT score was the best solution. He emphasized that he was not out to de-

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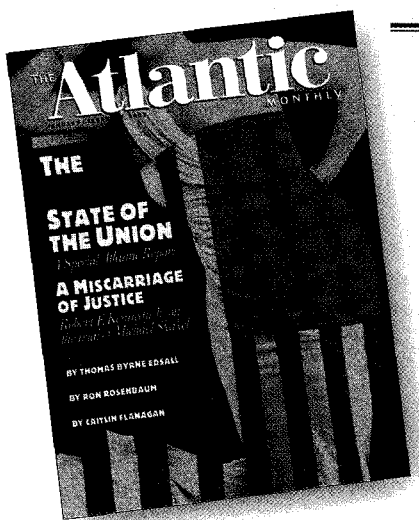
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stroy the most important product of ETS and the College Board. He was *not* proposing a completely new SAT. He liked the adjustments the College Board was making to the test, including the thirty-minute essay section that would be added in 2005. He wanted his R-SAT scores to be sent to colleges as a bonus, to help them identify students, mostly lower-income students of all races, whose SAT scores suffered because of the distance between the language of their families and neighborhoods and that of middle-class America.

He did not try to estimate how many students would benefit from this additional information, but he thought it would be enough to make the supplement worthwhile. Freedle found one African-American student (Freedle's data gave no names) whose verbal R-SAT score was 600 although his or her original verbal SAT score was only 290.

"This student's gain score is 310 points—an astonishingly large reassessment of his/her scholastic skills," Freedle wrote. Potentially thousands of students would score 100 to 200 points higher on the R-SAT than on the SAT; that higher score could mean the difference between getting into a selective college and not. Such increases in their scores might also make them eligible for thousands of dollars in scholarships.

Freedle confessed that he did not have enough data to analyze the current form of the SAT, which differs in some ways from the SAT he had analyzed while still working at ETS. But he saw no reason why an R-SAT score wouldn't still benefit some minority students. Nor did he think that the SAT changes to take effect in 2005, including the removal of the analogies, would be enough to eliminate the need for an R-SAT, since the gap between easy words and hard words—or the gap between what people learn at home and what they learn at school—affected other parts of the test. He hoped that ETS would give his analysis the follow-up it deserved: a rigorous testing of its validity and predictive value. "The expense is truly minimal, the moral obligation maximal," he concluded.

When Drew Gitomer read the *Review* article, he felt not only that Freedle's conclusion was wrong but that his analysis was nonsense. It was based on snippets of old data and seemed to put great weight on correct answers that could be explained as random guesses.

He asked some of his staff members to look at it, and then thought about what he should do. He helped the College Board to post a quick Web-site response, which criticized Freedle's paper as "flawed" and "misleading," and organized his staff to produce something longer and more complete, but still he worried about Freedle's use of SAT data, which he thought might be College Board property.

Gitomer, like Freedle, was a cognitive psychologist committed to the values of science. He had arrived at ETS in 1985 with a keen interest in finding better ways of training people for complex tasks and in creating alternatives to fill-in-the-box assessment tools like the SAT. Five years later, not yet thirty-five, he won the company's annual Scientist Award. But in 1999 Gitomer agreed to be the top administrator of the research division. So when Freedle's article appeared, the job of damage control fell to him. The ETS

executive had promised himself that he would not get angry on the phone. He would not discuss the many large holes he saw in the article. He just wanted to be able to answer the questions he anticipated from the College Board: Had Freedle used some of its data that he was not authorized to have? Were more such articles on the way?

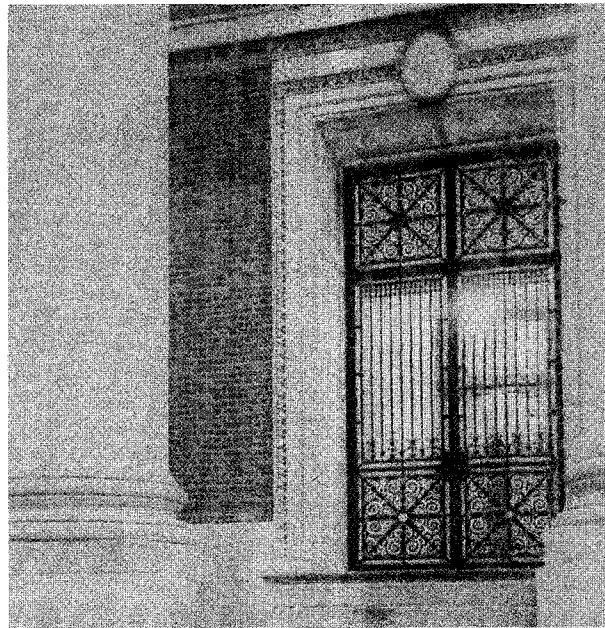
The pleasantries did not take long. Gitomer got to the point. "I have read your paper in the *Harvard Educational Review*," he said. "Where did you get the data?"

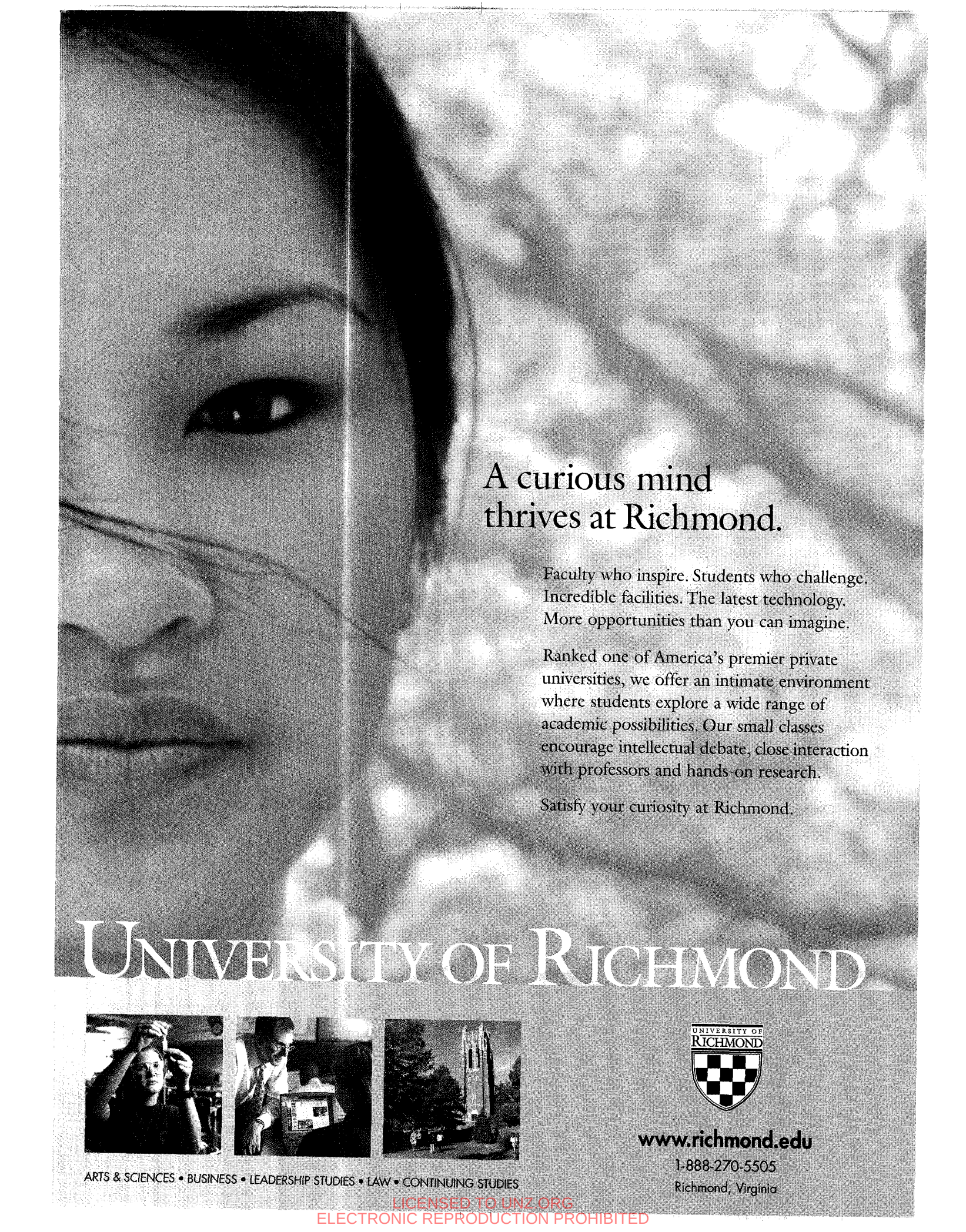
"That's the wrong question," Freedle replied. He wanted Gitomer to see the benefits of taking his work seriously. "You should view this, and the College Board should view this, as a positive development, and I really mean it. I have solved a significant problem for you."

Gitomer could see that he was not going to get an answer, but he tried again. "Well, let me ask you, then," he said. "How else did you get the data?"

"Again, that is the wrong question," Freedle said. "I think you must use this as a positive thing." He was not going to talk about people who might have shared information with him, and Gitomer was not interested in pushing him further. He asked if Freedle had any more articles in the works. Freedle said no. Relieved, Gitomer said good-bye and hung up.

Gitomer wrote a note to himself on the top of the first page of Freedle's article: "Call Atkinson." This was a reference to Richard C. Atkinson, the president of the University





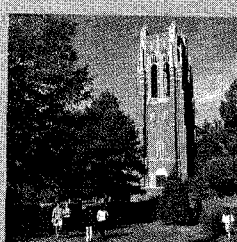
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of California system. Atkinson had become the fulcrum of the SAT debate. Like Freedle and Gitomer, he was a cognitive psychologist who understood how the SAT was constructed. Parts of the test he did not like. It had too many psychometric tricks (in his view, the analogies were the worst) that forced college applicants to take expensive SAT-prep courses in order to decipher what Atkinson thought were irrelevancies—for example, is “entomology to insects” more like “agriculture to cows” or “pedagogy to education”? So, wielding his power, the U.C. president had persuaded the College Board to junk the analogies, add more-advanced math, and create the writing section for the 2005 version. He did this as a way of making the test fairer for all students. And Gitomer knew that he was likely to be intrigued by any suggestion that certain questions put minority students at a disadvantage.

Freedle realized the same thing, and decided to call Atkinson himself. His call was returned by Patrick S. Hayashi, the associate president of the U.C. system. After a friendly chat Hayashi suggested that Freedle talk with Saul Geiser, the director of research in Atkinson’s office. Geiser told Freedle that U.C. planned to do just the kind of serious analysis of the latest data that Freedle had

argument, we could substantially reduce all group differences if the test were made significantly more difficult so that all examinees would have to guess the answers to nearly all of the questions. We could then predict that each subgroup would have to have an average of 20 percent of their answers correct, based on chance.

Freedle’s response to this, in a draft memo that he never sent to the College Board, was “Shame on you.” He said he had done a statistical analysis of the five choices in the questions studied and found that the students’ picks did not seem to be random at all; taking his study further would not be adding error to error. Some independent experts dismissed the Freedle piece. “I was unimpressed,” says Robert Linn, a University of Colorado professor and a former president of the American Educational Research Association. “I don’t think there is much there.” But some found it valuable. Robert Calfee, a retired Stanford cognitive psychologist who now serves as the dean of the education school at U.C. Riverside, said he found Freedle’s article “very convincing and to me very understandable.” His analysis of the effect of different language cultures on test results, Calfee said, seemed to mirror other research on the powerful differences be-

When the ETS executive read Freedle’s analysis, he felt not only that it was wrong but that it was nonsense. It was based on snippets of old data and seemed to put great weight on correct answers that could be explained as random guesses.

hoped ETS and the College Board would do.

As it happened, Gitomer did not call Atkinson, but a few days later he spoke to Mark Wilson, a Berkeley psychometrician who had been asked by U.C. to analyze Freedle’s report. Gitomer told Wilson that he welcomed the U.C. study, because Freedle had raised serious issues—“no matter how scientifically bankrupt I believe they are.” Wayne Camara, of the College Board, said that he, too, was happy to cooperate. However, the College Board’s Web-site response to Freedle’s article seemed to imply that any study of Freedle’s results would be largely a waste of time.

Let us look briefly at the data for the so-called SAT-R Section that Freedle recommends. On the difficult items that are included in the SAT-R, African-American candidates receive an average score of 22 percent out of a perfect score of 100 percent. Since there are five answer options for each question, 22 percent is only slightly above what would be expected from random guessing, namely 20 percent. White candidates do somewhat better, achieving an average score of 31 percent. The results indicate that this test is too hard for either group and would be a frustrating experience for most students. There are simply too many questions that are geared to those with a much higher level of knowledge and skill than is required of college freshmen. Extending Freedle’s

tween formal language learned at school and informal (often called natural) language learned at home. Michael T. Brown, a professor of education at U.C. Santa Barbara, called the article “a competently performed work, thought-provoking, and sensitive with respect to the issues of equity.”

So while the University of California pursues its study, Freedle hopes that he is finally getting someplace after having his most provocative work stuffed into ETS file drawers. Nearly all those involved—ETS and College Board officials, University of California researchers, high school guidance counselors and admissions officers from those schools that would be affected by a change in the SAT—are, like Freedle, practical people with a seemingly distant but still compelling goal. They want to remove barriers that limit young people’s choices in life. All of them, Freedle included, acknowledge that many other things, more difficult than devising a scoring supplement to a multiple-choice test, will have to be done to make that happen. ▀

Jay Mathews is an education reporter and online columnist for The Washington Post. His latest book is Harvard Schmarvard: Getting Beyond the Ivy League to the College That Is Best for You. He has won Benjamin Fine awards for best education feature story and best education column.



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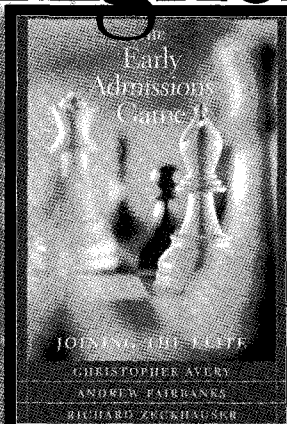
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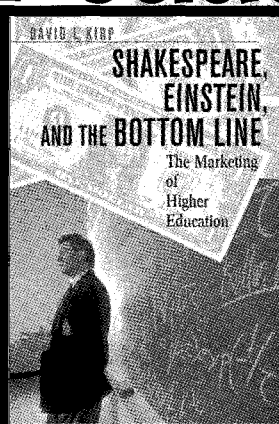
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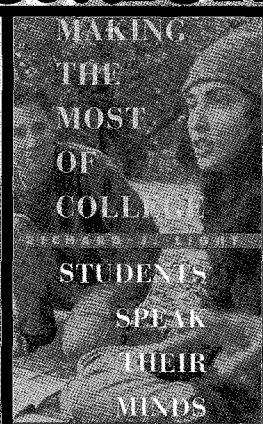
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"I reflect on Mark Twain and I see not just the man who gave us Judge Thatcher's fetching daughter but also the figure who dismissed the Book of Mormon as 'chloroform in print.'" Christopher Hitchens on Fred Kaplan's *The Singular Mark Twain*
PAGE 148

Let's Call the Whole Thing Off

Caitlin Flanagan reviews two new wedding books: *There Goes the Bride*, by Rachel Safier with Wendy Roberts, and *Cinderella Dreams*, by Cele C. Otmes and Elizabeth H. Pleck
PAGE 153

Princess of Discrimination

Thomas Mallon reviews Shirley Hazzard's *The Great Fire*
PAGE 156

Collected Artistry

The Early Stories 1953-1975, by John Updike, reviewed by Scott Shibuya Brown
PAGE 160

The Story of a War

The Iraq War: A Military History, by Williamson Murray and Major General Robert H. Scales Jr., reviewed by Robert D. Kaplan
PAGE 161

Fabulous Forgeries

My Life as a Fake, by Peter Carey, reviewed by Michael Gorra
PAGE 163

Their Show of Shows

Corby Kummer reviews Ted Chapin's *Everything Was Possible: The Birth of the Musical Follies*
PAGE 165

NEW & NOTEWORTHY

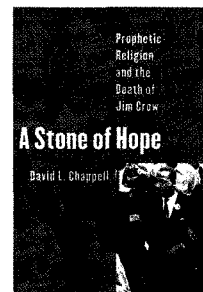
What to read this month

BY BENJAMIN SCHWARZ

.....

Chappell's is one of the three or four most important books on the civil-rights movement, but because its conclusions will unsettle, or at least irritate, much of its natural constituency, it will surely fail to gain the attention it deserves. This unusually sophisticated and subtle study takes an unconventional and imaginative approach by examining both sides in the struggle: Chappell asks what strengthened those who fought segregation in the South and what weakened their enemies. His answer in both cases is evangelical Christianity.

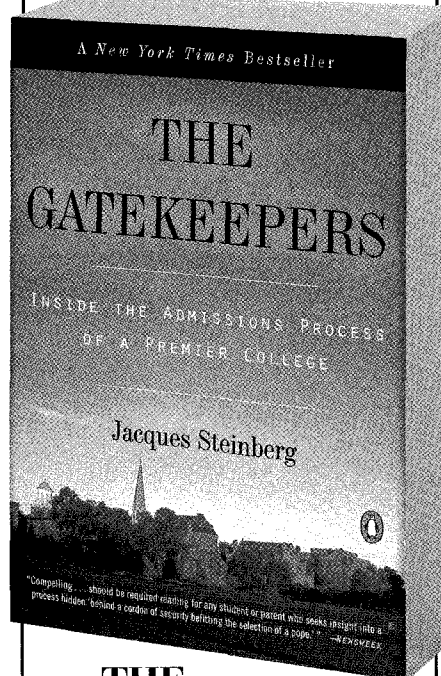
He argues persuasively that revivalism engendered the civil-rights movement's solidarity, leadership, world view, and rhetoric. Inspired by what he characterizes as this "illiberal" faith, southern black activists led what was at heart a religious movement with political dimensions. Although previous historians have noted this, Chappell, a liberal atheist, goes further, contending, again convincingly, that the ethos of the southern black movement—its pessimistic view of human nature, together with its ultimately redemptive faith—was not merely different from but in essential ways antithetical to northerners' tepid liberalism. He points out, for instance, that Martin Luther King's often fundamentalist religious views and his excoriation of such elements of secular culture as rock-and-roll were positions foreign to his liberal sometime allies, and that the secular liberal creed of pluralism and political equality had proved inadequate and largely irrelevant to the contest in which southern blacks were engaged. (Chappell is especially, and justifiably, hard on the liberal pseudo-tough guy Arthur Schlesinger Jr., whose position on the race issue he sees as both bland and obtuse.) Chappell's greatest insight, however, is to discern that the struggle against segregation triumphed owing not only to the religious views of southern blacks but also to the religious views of southern whites. Evangelical Christianity undermined whites' segregationist convictions even as it bolstered the black community's resolve—a fact that black leaders recognized and shrewdly exploited. By inventively mining archival material previously unexploited by civil-rights scholars (the correspondence of the White Citizens' Councils and of the editorial secretary of the Southern Baptist Convention's Sunday School Board, for example), Chappell makes a brilliant point



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at once startling and obvious: in the struggle over segregation white denizens of the Bible Belt, no less than black ones, needed the cultural depth, tradition, and moral authority of their churches. But, as Chappell reminds us (the facts were always available but have remained unexplored), the segregationists got none of that. In the mid-1950s the Southern Baptists and the Southern Presbyterians each overwhelmingly passed resolutions endorsing desegregation, and appealing to all southerners to accept it peacefully (in the Southern Baptist Convention the vote was staggeringly lopsided—about 9,000 to 50). In a land that embraced literalist views of the Bible, nearly every important southern white conservative clergyman and theologian averred that there was no biblical sanction for segregation or for white supremacy. And the country's—and world's—best-known Southern Baptist, the North Carolinian Billy Graham, shared the pulpit with Martin Luther King in 1957, commended what he called the "social revolution" King was leading in the South, and, having no truck with what he saw as the modern, secular concept of racism, insisted, even in the Deep South and in contravention of local laws there, that his revival meetings (along with his ushering staffs and choir) be integrated. (As a student of both evangelical Christianity and southern history, I've long known of this heroic aspect of Graham's career, but Chappell makes the important suggestion, alas undeveloped, that in fact the Graham revival of the 1950s and 1960s—a national, indeed international, phenomenon—was, by vitiating the forces of segregation in the southern white community, crucial to the success of the civil-rights struggle.) All this was plain to southern segregationists at the time, and indeed they understood that the white southern churches—although few clergymen were as stalwart as Graham—were their de facto enemies. (Which is why, for instance, the White Citizens' Councils progressed from an anti-clerical to an increasingly anti-Christian stance.) Without the sanction of their churches, Chappell concludes, "the segregationists' foundations in southern white culture were mushy. The segrega-

tionists had popular opinion behind them, but not popular conviction." In elevating evangelical Christianity as a crucial element to both sides of the civil-rights struggle—and in recognizing that white southerners responded, however reluctantly and tentatively, to the force of the Christian message they shared with their black fellow southerners (an interpretation Leslie Dunbar, Christopher Lasch, and Joel Williamson adumbrated)—Chappell is one of many historians who are bringing religion to the forefront in the study of American history generally and of social and political movements particularly. But, of course, the crucial importance of the (black and white) South's religiosity to the defeat of Jim Crow was long ago recognized by King, who always spoke of himself as a southerner, and who wrote of "our beloved Southland." He understood what V. S. Naipaul, in his journey through the South in the mid-1980s, would call "the great discovery of my travels": "In no other part of the world had I found people so driven by the idea of good behavior and the good religious life. And that was true for black and white."

CURRENT AFFAIRS

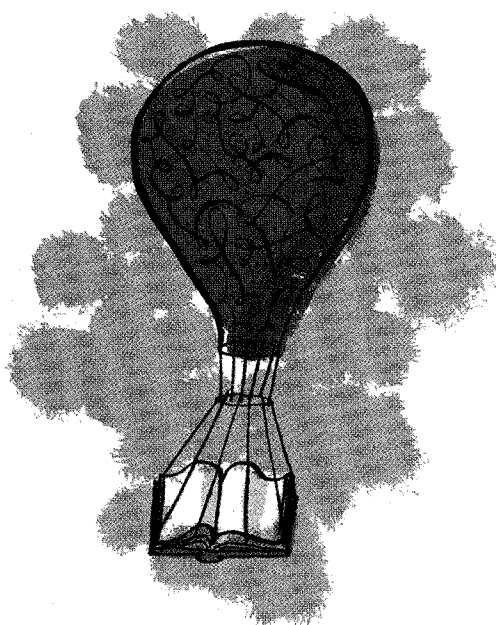
MADAM SECRETARY, by *Madeleine Albright* (Miramax). This memoir's publication provides ample evidence of the peculiarities of the book business, which is governed neither by the iron law of the bottom line nor by a high-minded commitment to producing literary works of lasting value—or at least of passing significance. Albright had been out of office less than a week when Harvey Weinstein, the thuggishly glamorous co-chairman of Miramax Films (no doubt just off the phone with Gwyneth Paltrow), tracked her down at a spa in Mexico to urge her to choose Miramax Books as her publisher. That any publisher would so ardently pursue this quarry is quite odd; that the tinseliest would be unfathomable. Nearly all high officials' memoirs are as unrevealing as they are self-serving. (Albright's, no surprise, lacks a forthright account of the Clinton Administration's complicity, or acquiescence, in Croatia's ethnic

cleansing of the Krajina Serbs; of the decision to expand NATO, the most sweeping expansion of America's security commitments since the late 1940s; or of the causes and conduct of the war against Yugoslavia—the first war the U.S.-led NATO waged, and one fought against a country that, however unsavory, posed no threat to any member of the alliance, least of all the United States. Readers will, however, find much State Department spin circa 1998, complete with the inevitable invocation of the lessons of Munich.) Moreover, such books promise to be boring, for when a former Cabinet officer—unlike, say, a record producer—reminisces, she perforce adopts the sonorous and bloated tone of one writing *A Work of History*, as she chronicles, for example, her speech endorsing “inter-cultural communications.” So *Madam Secretary* won't be flying off the shelves at Costco, nor does it rival *Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand*. It's neither better nor worse than others of its ilk, although the former secretary's unwinning attitude and demeanor, which uniquely combine the attributes of the Democratic Party hack and the self-righteous Wilsonian, prove as irrepressible in print as they were when she sought and held office.

LITERARY STUDIES

GOETHE, VOLUME II, by Nicholas Boyle (Oxford). Few readers—even *Atlantic* readers—will actually attempt Boyle's entire biography of Goethe. This, his second of a projected three volumes (which covers the years 1790 to 1803, and has just been released in paperback), runs 958 pages, and life, after all, is short. For years I shied away from Volume I (848 pages), and I read Volume II only when forced—I sat on a book-prize jury that was considering it. Once finished, however, I couldn't wait to open the first volume. Even if you don't read this opus, you should know about it: Boyle's will remain one of the few towering works of biography and history of our time. Recognized as the sovereign intellect of his age—he was a poet, a playwright, a theater director, a

philosopher, a botanist, and an expert in politics, mining (!), and optics—Goethe knew or corresponded with nearly every important European mind. This is a suitably rich study: Boyle writes with dexterous authority on the French Revolution's impact on the Continent's intellectual and political life; with emotional acuity about “the utter ordinariness” of Goethe's love for his plump mistress (the mother of his son), and on Goethe's ambivalent friendship with Schiller; with novelistic vividness on the Prussians' horrifyingly chaotic campaign against the French revolutionary armies; with stylish engagement in summoning



the “philosophical crucible” of late-eighteenth-century Jena (“intellectually speaking ... the most exciting place in the world,” where Goethe, Schiller, Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, Humboldt, Hölderlin, and the Schlegel brothers were all writing); with fluency and originality in dissecting Kantian philosophy and the ideas of nearly all the major figures Goethe moved among (for those, like myself, far more familiar with English and French intellectual history, Boyle, the head of the German department at Cambridge, is a discerning and sympathetic guide to the intricacies of German thought and literature); and with deftness and sureness as he interweaves his (almost daily) account of Goethe's life with an astute and innovative critical assessment of Goethe's

writings. Rarely is a definitive and magnificent work of scholarship so engrossing: Boyle's very amplitude captivates the reader, as he slowly, commandingly envelops you in Goethe's mind and age.

THE SCOFIELD STUDY BIBLE, KING JAMES VERSION, 2003 Edition (Oxford). Frustration confronts the general reader shopping for an annotated edition of the King James Version of the Bible. It's the single greatest work of English literature (even the most ungodly H. L. Mencken pronounced it “probably the most beautiful piece of writing in all the literature of the world”), and no one who hasn't read it thoroughly should be considered well educated. But, of course, the Bible generally is a recondite book, full of obscure religious, historical, ethnographic, calendrical, even agricultural references. Moreover, some of the vocabulary and usage in the KJV, specifically, is archaic, and the translation itself is not infrequently inaccurate. In short, just as most serious readers would want an intelligently and meticulously annotated edition of Shakespeare's work (say, the Arden or the Pelican edition), so they'd also want the same for the KJV. The difficulty for the reader approaching the KJV as a literary work is that none of the most detailed annotated editions are objective. That is, they

all advance a particular theological viewpoint—and the best ones (the Scofield Study Bible, the Ryrie Study Bible, and the King James Study Bible) uphold a fundamentalist viewpoint that often heavily colors the notes, glosses, and cross-references. For instance, although Oxford University Press publishes this new edition of the Scofield, it's not a neutral scholarly work; rather, it adheres strongly to a dispensational premillennialist theological orientation, and its notes lay out an elaborate chronology of dispensations (it holds that the Bible contains the key to prophecies about the Second Coming, and in fact the original, 1909 edition contributed enormously to solidifying dispensationalist dogma among fundamentalists and evangelicals).



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Interspersed with its sometimes stridently assertive interpretive notes are clearly written, objective annotations, enlightening maps, and even a table of biblical weights and measures. The annotations, though, don't approach the scope and depth of those in the New Oxford Annotated Bible and the HarperCollins Study Bible, which represent the best in ecumenical British and American Bible scholarship but use the New Revised Standard Version as their text—a far more accurate translation, but one that utterly lacks literary distinction.

Here's an idea for—or, rather (from this secular reader), a plea to—Oxford University Press or HarperCollins: print the KJV text, have a scholar of seventeenth-century English literature annotate the obsolete vocabulary and usage, and add the New Oxford Annotated Bible's or the HarperCollins Study Bible's unsurpassed notes, concordances, and glosses. This would give us an authoritative and illuminating edition, perfect for those who wish to read the Bible as literature.

THE AFTERLIFE, by *Penelope Fitzgerald* (Counterpoint). Fitzgerald, who died in 2000, was a very English novelist—quiet, restrained, precise. She admired those who eschewed “making too much of things,” and her ideals were of the sort that, as she discerned, George Eliot esteemed: “work, steadiness, harmony, peace.” The editors of this unusually intelligent and sensitively selected collection of her criticism have chosen mainly those pieces that explore the authors of the “books of her heart”—mostly minor, often overlooked writers who were, as she lovingly describes E. M. Delafield, “accurate, calm, and lucid,” and who composed books that could be considered “somber” if they “were less witty, and less deceptively mild.” Taken as a whole, Fitzgerald's pieces on Delafield, Sylvia Townsend Warner, the *Punch* writers, Mrs. Oliphant (who excelled at what she called the “tragi-farce,” a form Fitzgerald clearly loved), J. L. Carr, and Barbara Pym define a writerly sensibility of which Fitzgerald herself was, sadly, among the last adherents. This book is worth its price just for Fitzgerald's spot-on description of Pym's mordant

vision of the distance between the sexes: “If men are less than angels, Barbara Pym's men are rather less than men, not wanting much more than constant attention and comfort. Their theses must be typed ... endless dinners cooked, remarks listened to ... and the forces of nature and society combine to ensure, even in the 1980s, that they get these things. Women see through them clearly enough, but are drawn toward them by their own need and by a compassion which is taken entirely for granted.”

HISTORY

GOVERNOR REAGAN, by *Lou Cannon* (PublicAffairs). Cannon's fifth book on Ronald Reagan is far from his best—largely because Cannon is covering ground (Reagan's rise to political prominence and his eight years as California's governor) tilted rather assiduously in two of his previous volumes. Still, Cannon—whose *Official Negligence*, an examination of the Rodney King case and the 1992 Los Angeles riots, remains among the two or three most meticulous, nuanced, and honest works of reportage I've read—is such a smooth storyteller, with insights so keen and a subject so fascinating, that readers will hardly care. He is especially trenchant in his assessments of the Communists' squalid attempts to infiltrate the Hollywood unions, the transformation of the national Republican Party, the internecine squabbles that infected the California Republican Party, Reagan's progressive environmental policies as governor (as opposed to the rather retrograde policies he pursued as President), and the reaction of Middle American Californians (represented by the Illinois transplant Reagan) to the Kulturkampf of the 1960s. The story of Reagan's ascendancy as a political figure is, of course, the story of the ascendancy of the New Right in modern American politics, but this book confirms Cannon's previous verdict (equally unpalatable to the knee-jerk left and right) that Reagan's “conservatism was tempered and pragmatic during his eight years as governor and eight years as president.” ■

Benjamin Schwarz is the literary editor of The Atlantic.



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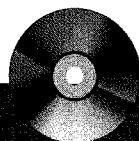
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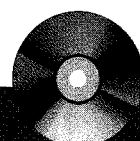
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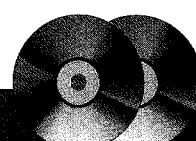
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AMERICAN RADICAL

*Mark Twain developed an enormous and subversive personality
—but Fred Kaplan's new biography illuminates it only in flickers*

BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

.....

There are four rules governing literary art in the domain of biography—some say five. In *The Singular Mark Twain*, Fred Kaplan violates all five of them. These five require:

1) That a biography shall cause us to wish we had known its subject in person, and inspire in us a desire to improve on such vicarious acquaintance as we possess. *The Singular Mark Twain* arouses in the reader an urgently fugitive instinct, as at the approach of an unpolished yet tenacious raconteur.

2) That the elements of biography make a distinction between the essential and the inessential, winnowing the quotidian and burnishing those moments of glory and elevation that place a human life in the first rank. *The Singular Mark Twain* puts all events and conversations on the same footing, and fails to enforce any distinction between wood and trees.

3) That a biographer furnish something by way of context, so that the place of the subject within history and society is illuminated, and his progress through life made intelligible by reference to his times. This condition is by no means met in *The Singular Mark Twain*.

4) That the private person be allowed to appear in all his idiosyncrasy, and not as a mere reflection of the correspondence or reminiscences of others, or as a subjective projection of the mind of the biographer. But this rule is flung down and danced upon in *The Singular Mark Twain*.

5) That a biographer have some conception of his subject, which he wishes to advance or defend against prevailing or even erroneous interpretations. This detail, too, has been overlooked in *The Singular Mark Twain*.

As can readily be seen from this attempt on my part at a pastiche of Twain's hatchet-wielding arraignment of James Fenimore Cooper (and of Cooper's anti-

masterpiece *The Deerslayer*), the work of Samuel Langhorne Clemens is in the proper sense inimitable. But it owes this quality to certain irrepressible elements—many of them quite *noir*—in the makeup of the man himself. I reflect on Mark Twain and I see not just the man who gave us Judge Thatcher's fetching daughter but also the figure who wrote so cunningly about the charm of underage girls and so bluntly about defloration. The man who impaled the founder of Christian Science on a stake of contemptuous ridicule and who dismissed the Book

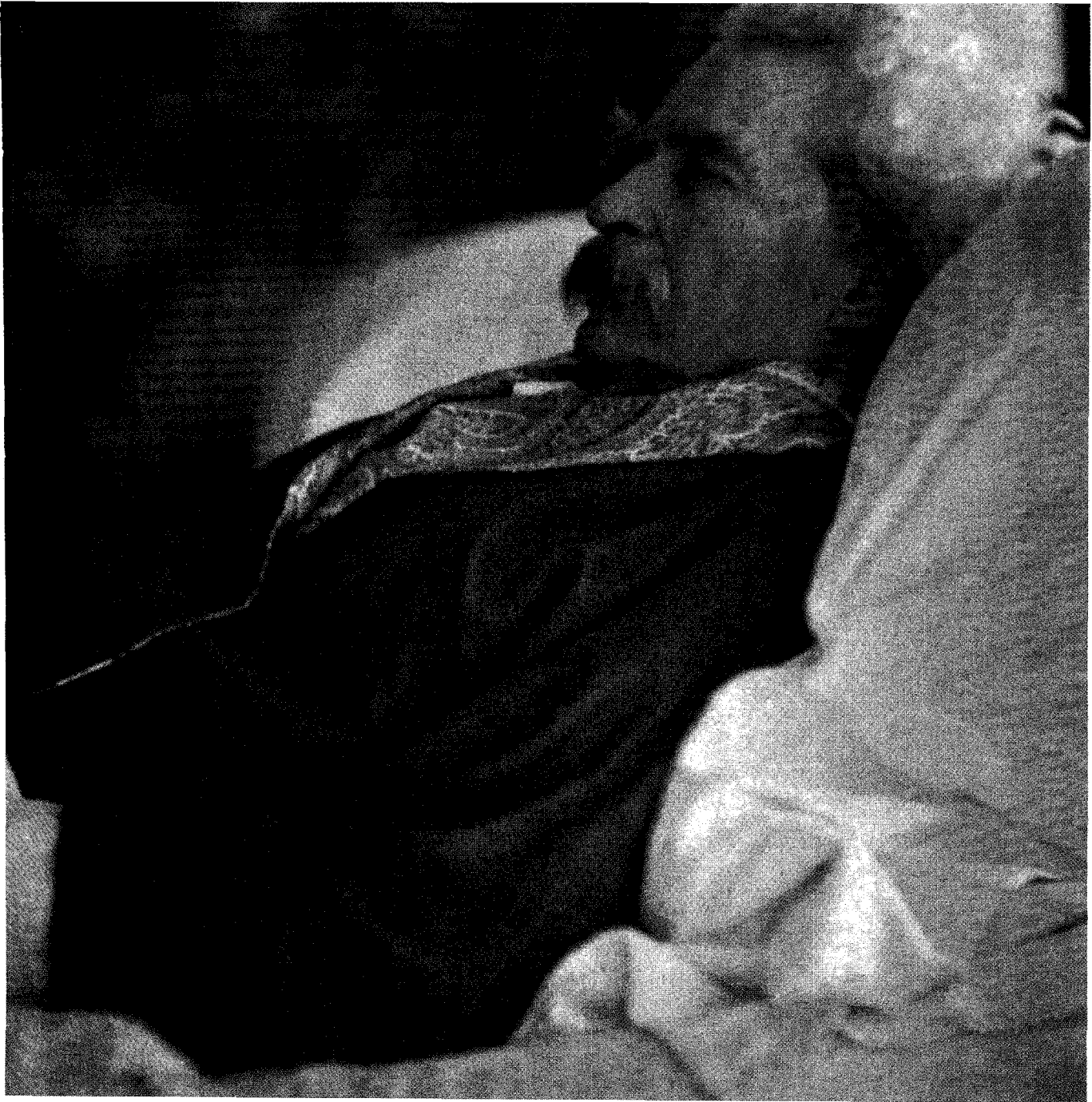
of Mormon as "chloroform in print." The man who was so livid with anger at his country's arrogance abroad that he laid aside his work to inveigh against imperialism. The man who addressed an after-dinner gathering of the Stomach Club, in Paris, on the subject of masturbation, and demonstrated that he had done the hard thinking about hand jobs. Flickers of this enormous and subversive personality illumine Kaplan's narrative, but only rarely, and then in the manner of the lightning bug that Twain himself contrasted with the lightning.

Ernest Hemingway's much cited truism—to the effect that *Huckleberry Finn* hadn't been transcended by any subsequent American writer—understated, if anything, the extent to which Twain was not just a founding author but a founding American. Until his appearance, even writers as adventurous as Hawthorne and Melville would have been gratified to receive the praise of a comparison to Walter Scott. (A boat named the *Walter Scott* is sunk with some ignominy in Chapter 13 of *Huckleberry Finn*.) Twain originated in the riverine, slaveholding heartland; compromised almost as much as Missouri itself when it came to the Civil War; headed out to California ("the Lincoln of our literature"

THE SINGULAR
MARK TWAIN
by Fred Kaplan
Doubleday



made a name in the state that Lincoln always hoped to see and never did); and conquered the eastern seaboard in his own sweet time. But though he had an unimpeachable claim to be from native ground, there was nothing provincial or crabbed about his declaration of independence for American letters. (His evisceration of Cooper can be read as an assault on any form of pseudo-native authenticity.) More than most of his countrymen, he voyaged around the world and pitted himself against non-American authors of equivalent contemporary weight.



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What about his name? Kaplan's title and introduction imply a contradiction between the uniqueness of the man and the suggestion, in his selection of a nom de plume, of a divided self. When I was a lad, I am quite sure, I read of the young Clemens's listening to the incantation of a leadsman plumbing the shoals from the bow of a riverboat and calling out, "By the mark—twain!" as he indicated the deeps and shallows. This story, if true, would account for both the first and the second name, and it would also be apt in seeing both as derived from

life on the Mississippi. But there's some profit (not all that much, but some) in doing as Kaplan does and speculating on other origins. In 1901 Twain told an audience at the Lotos Club, in New York, "When I was born, I was a member of a firm of twins. And one of them disappeared." This was not the case, but by 1901 Twain had been Twain for thirty-eight years (a decade longer than he had been Samuel Clemens), and had probably acquired a repertoire of means by which to answer a stale question from the audience. Twinship and imperson-

ation come up in his stories, it is true. *Pudd'nhead Wilson* relies on the old fantasy of the changeling, and notebook scenarios for late Huck and Tom stories involve rapid switches of identity, with elements of racial as well as sexual cross-dressing. But then, how new is the discovery that Twain never lost his access to the marvels and memories of childhood?

Clearly, he meant to create a mild form of mystery if he could, because elsewhere he claimed to have annexed the name from "one Captain Isaiah Sellers who used to write river news over it

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AN ANCHOR BOOKS PAPERBACK ORIGINAL

for the New Orleans *Picayune*." But the *Picayune* never carried any such byline. And Twain was known all his life to be fond of hoaxes and spoofs in print, among them the "Petrified Man." So, absent any new or decisive information, this portentous search for the roots of an identity crisis may be somewhat pointless.

One of the difficulties confronting a Twain biographer is the sheer volume of ink the man expended on his own doings. One needs a persuasive reason for preferring a secondhand account of an episode that is already available in the original. Take, for instance, Twain's inglorious participation on the Confederate side in the Civil War. We already have his own hilarious but sour account of this interlude, in "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed," a sort of brief and memoiristic precursor of *The Good Soldier Schweik*. This melancholy, rueful, and slightly self-hating account of cowardice and bravado, with its awful culmination in the slaying of an innocent, clearly sets the tone for all Twain's later writings on the subject of war. Kaplan furnishes a brisk yet somehow trudging précis of the "Private History," adding that it is "undoubtedly partly fictional" but declining to say in what respect this is so or how he knows it.

It is much the same when we come to the fabled voyage of the good ship *Quaker City* to the Holy Land and back. This wickedly close observation of the habits and mentality of the common American pilgrim was a huge sensation when first published, and it is easy to see even today how scandalized the pious and the respectable must have been. But how much fun is there to be had in scanning a condensed and potted summary of *Innocents Abroad*? Moreover, and as with the Civil War passage, Kaplan almost bowdlerizes the tale by omitting much of Twain's original pungency and contempt, or by rendering it very indirectly.

One would be grateful for some idea of the root of Twain's dislike for religiosity, and especially of his revulsion from Christianity. In a somewhat oblique earlier passage Kaplan suggests that it originated in shock at the death of his brother Henry, in a ghastly steam-

boat explosion in 1858. The randomness and caprice of this event, we are told, persuaded Twain that there was no such thing as a merciful Providence. This seems a pardonable surmise. Similar tragic events, however, have the effect of reinforcing faith in many other people. What was it about Twain that made him not just an agnostic or an atheist but a probable sympathizer with the Devil's party? We are not enlightened.

On lesser matters Kaplan can speculate until the cows come home. What was the origin of the physical frailty that afflicted Livy Langdon, Twain's future wife?

It may be that her condition was psychosomatic, an instance of the widespread phenomenon of Victorian young women withdrawing from the world for unspecified emotional reasons with serious physical symptoms, often referred to as neurasthenia. It may be that her illness was organic. Perhaps she was indeed ill with a disease of the spine, such as Pott's disease, which has recently been suggested: an illness in which chronic back pain and stiffness lead to partial paralysis. Perhaps she had in fact injured her spine in a fall. Without magnetic resonance imaging and CAT scans, the Victorians were even more helpless than later generations to diagnose or cure back pain.

This is padding. (The same needless verbosity occurs when Twain's daughter Jean dies in her bath, much later on: "Perhaps Jean had had an epileptic attack and blacked out. She may have drowned. Perhaps she had had a heart attack. What exactly killed her is unclear.")

Kaplan's prose is something less than an unalloyed joy to read, and its faults are such that one can sometimes not be certain when, or if, he is joking. A little after the dull passage about Livy above we learn of Langdon's regaining the ability to walk and are informed that "Livy's recovery, along with their continued prosperity, confirmed the family's strong religious faith." After reading this aloud several times, I concluded that it was meant as a plain statement of fact. Later, in retelling a story in which Finley Peter Dunne affected to think that he himself was a greater celebrity than Twain, Kaplan appears to exclude altogether the possibility that the au-

thor of the "Mr. Dooley" columns might have been joking.

Twain was often nettled by the contrary suggestion, that he was playing the comic when in fact he was attempting to be serious. This was especially the case at the turn of the century, when he became outraged by the McKinley-Roosevelt policy of expansionism in the Philippines and Cuba, and also by the sanguinary hypocrisy of America's Christian "missionaries" in China. The articles and pamphlets he wrote in that period, some of them too incendiary to see print at the time, are an imperishable part both of his own oeuvre and of the American radical journalistic tradition. I would single out in particular his essay on the

who will benefit from it most is that student who wishes to study the phenomenon of the author as businessman. The record of Twain's battles over copyright and royalties, and the story of his fluctuating success and failure as an investor, are told with great assiduity. Contemptuous as he may have been of the Gilded Age and the acquisitive society, Twain was ever ravenous for money, and his acumen was almost inversely proportionate to his ambition. Usually a man with a keen eye for fraud and imposture, he was lured to invest in numerous improbable schemes, and the tale of his won-and-lost fortunes is worth relating as a great American example of thwarted but unquenchable

A difficulty confronting a Twain biographer is the sheer volume of ink the man expended on his own doings. One needs a persuasive reason for preferring a secondhand account of an episode already available in the original.

massacre of the Moro Islanders—a piece of work to stand comparison with Swift's "A Modest Proposal." Nor did he confine himself to the printed word: with William Dean Howells he helped to animate the Anti-Imperialist League. This entire passage in his career is all but skipped by Kaplan, who awards it a few paragraphs, mentioning only that the New England branch of the Anti-Imperialist League reprinted one of the polemics, and confining himself to brief excerpts from a couple of the better-known articles. This scant treatment is redeemed only partially by an account of the celebrated public exchange between Twain and the young Winston Churchill in New York. Twain famously teased and chided the youthful firebrand of Britain's imperial war in South Africa. (One would like to have been present at that meeting.) Kaplan does give us a contemporary snippet from an anonymous attendee that makes those remarks appear to have been even more sulphurous than we had previously thought.

In general, though, this biography is terse when it ought to be expansive, and expansive when it could well do with being more terse. The student

entrepreneurship. As a result of these exigencies he wrote altogether too many words, and now his biographer has cited too many of the mediocre ones and not enough of the brilliant ones. I did eventually come across a reference to the 1879 Stomach Club lecture on "the Science of Onanism." This masterly effort is only a few paragraphs long and screams aloud for quotation but does not get it. Instead Kaplan merely repeats the title of the talk and describes it thus:

A brilliant, bawdy takeoff on the subject of masturbation, it was, like "1601," an expression of the subversive, anti-Victorian side of Twain that, perforce, found some of its best moments in private jokes. Stoically he accepted that he himself and everything he did was determined by forces beyond his control. Some were cultural. Some were genetic. All were implacable.

The solemnity of this is near terminal. And the stone of non sequitur is further laid upon the grave of the joke. It is altogether wrong that a book about Mark Twain should be boring. ▀

Christopher Hitchens is a contributing editor of The Atlantic and a columnist for Vanity Fair. His latest book, A Long Short War: The Postponed Liberation of Iraq, has just been published.

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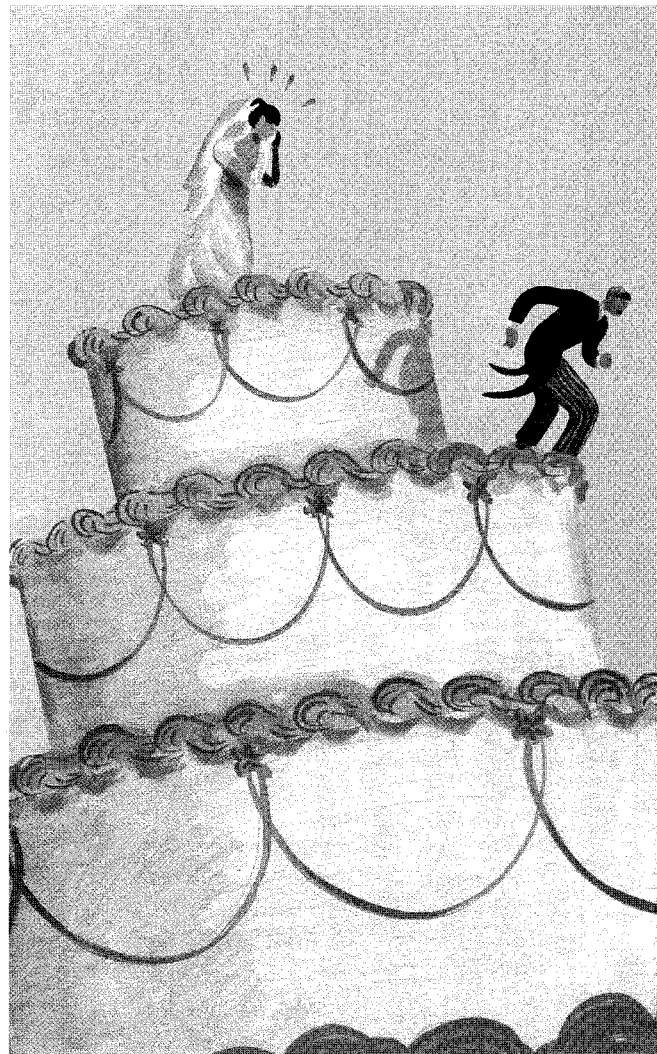
BY CAITLIN FLANAGAN

.....

Rachel Safier wrote *There Goes the Bride* during her year-long “recovery” from the fateful day when her fiancé canceled their wedding. It is, in many respects, a testament to the outsize suffering that often accompanies the minor sorrows of youth (“After my broken engagement, I felt like nothing made sense anymore. Not me, not the world”).

Safier had been planning the sort of big, formal white wedding with which we have all become so thoroughly familiar over the past couple of decades, and she can hardly be blamed for doing a slow burn when “Mark” delivered the devastating news a scant two weeks before liftoff. After throwing her engagement ring on the bed and storming out of the house, bee very much in bonnet, Safier decided to let the healing begin by sending a lengthy questionnaire to sixty-two other “Almost Brides” (who had responded to an inquiry she had posted on the wedding Web site TheKnot.com) and compiling their responses in chapters bearing titles such as “How We Called It Off” and “Finding Comfort, Finding Strength.” The particulars of Safier’s own trauma are shared in a recurring feature called “My Story,” which is printed on somber, gray-tinted pages. (A significant portion of “My Story” is devoted to explaining to readers—and this, one suspects, is no small measure of the impetus behind the writing of *There Goes the Bride*—that although it was Mark who actually dropped the bomb, Rachel had been *this close* to doing it herself on several occasions, and had stopped herself

only to spare his feelings.) The sixty-two Almost Brides are quite a cast of characters. As far as I could tell, all their weddings were wisely scotched, with top honors—in a very crowded field—belonging to Roxy, who “came home early one day from work with bad cramps.” She says, “He hadn’t expected me and didn’t hear me come in. I went



upstairs, and there he was—in my missing silk panties, slip, and camisole.” Is there bitterness among the Almost Brides? Aplenty. (Naomi: “His parents sat me down and told me that my attitude was unacceptable, that my family and I had no class, and that their son

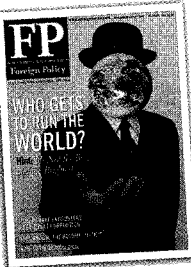
had decided that the wedding was off. As if their son could decide to wipe his ass by himself.”) Because the contemporary white wedding is an event staged by a dozen subcontractors, the book includes ample advice about breaking the bad news to one’s various vendors and possibly leveraging a broken heart into a refunded deposit. Compared with the nightmare of dealing with disappointed and possibly litigious caterers and florists, informing the “officiant” is a snap: have one of your parents tell him the wedding’s off and that you’ll get back to him. (Apparently he is supposed to return to his quiet lot of ministering to the sick and puzzling through Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* until the next show wagon rolls into town.)

As it happens, I broke off an engagement many years ago, and I do remember plenty of piquantly heightened emotions and dramatic turns of events. Had I been given a copy of *There Goes the Bride* during that overwrought time, I might have derived some comfort from it. Certainly the recipe for Baked Four-Cheese Macaroni sounds tasty, and—who knows?—it might have cheered me up to blast Pat Benatar’s “All Fired Up” at full volume. But even I—known for a tendency toward the histrionic—would have found much of the book’s counsel extreme. Granted, it was a bit embarrassing to have to cancel the salmon lunch I had planned, but doing so did not put me in need of the information contained under the justly urgent subheading “If You’re Afraid You’ll Hurt Yourself.” Nor would I have felt entitled to compare my stinky

bad luck to the plight of someone facing death—yet Safier trots us through Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’s five stages of death and dying along with bits of advice gleaned from such notorious pick-me-ups as “Mourning and Melancholia” and the *DSM-IV*.

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should
have read

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The drama and frenzy that the contemporary white wedding tends to inspire in its principals has lately become a topic of scholarly as well as popular attention. *Cinderella Dreams*, by the University of Illinois professors Cele C. Otnes and Elizabeth H. Pleck, examines “the relationship of ritual to consumer culture.” Although its prose is sometimes marred by the jargon of the academy (white weddings, we are tiresomely instructed, are “socially lauded manifestations of heterosexual, patriarchal, and racial-biased ideologies”), the book is a treasure trove of information about the history of the opulent modern wedding, from the development of bridal registries to the rise in popularity of the diamond engagement ring (a trend created almost entirely by a De Beers advertising campaign of the 1940s). The best chapter—a model of engaging social history—concerns the evolution of the honeymoon from a period of seclusion devoted to sexual initiation to one devoted to unwinding from the stress of wedding planning. (Certainly only the deeply naive would believe

that before the sexual revolution all women waited for marriage to consummate their relationships; it is, however, true that nice girls carefully fostered the outward impression of doing just that. As Oscar Levant once remarked of Doris Day, he knew her before she became a virgin.) It is this theme, of the unmooring of wedding customs and traditions from their original purposes, that propels the book most powerfully. Whereas a wedding once provided young people with a moment of transformation so powerful that even a modestly funded event was a momentous one, nowadays—with marriage an iffy bet and with most betrothed couples having already helped themselves to all the liberties of adulthood—the only way to underline the moment is to put on an elaborate and costly show. Further, there were once measures of propriety that held wedding spending in check: no large weddings for second-timers, or older brides, or couples of differing religions,

or the visibly pregnant, or cohabitating partners, or couples who would have to assume large debts to throw a lavish reception, or women whose sexual history was extensive and well known. But these strictures have all eroded. With clergymen and parents no longer the guardians of wedding rituals, that role has passed to retailers and party planners, who would happily marry a pair of baboons if someone was willing to foot the bill (indeed, the summer issue of *Martha Stewart Weddings* included “Tips for Making Your Favorite Furry or Feathered Friend a Part of the Festivities”).

Consider the Almost Brides, an astonishing number of whom allude in their tales of woe to children: children

they have borne to their fiancés, or to other men, or children that their fiancés have sired with previous wives or girlfriends. That these broken engagements (many of which ended in rage fests followed by what psychotherapists usually describe as “sexual acting out” on the part of the Almost Brides) may also have constituted periods of significant loss and grieving

for these children—who suddenly had to bid good-bye to a person they had expected would be a parent—goes entirely and shamefully unmentioned in *There Goes the Bride*. Such is the lot of children in our culture: absent stigmas on divorce or single parenting or illegitimacy, with religion often a governing factor in people's lives only to the extent that it is a boon rather than a constricting force, a child's fate in life is entirely dependent on the sexual and romantic whims of his parents. And come wedding time, the child is considered merely a cast member, a cunning little ring bearer or flower girl or—worst-case scenario—sulking adolescent in a shiny new suit of clothes, rather than someone whose life is about to be profoundly (if perhaps temporarily) affected by the events at hand.

Cinderella Dreams contains an exhaustive and rather wearing chapter on Hollywood depictions of weddings.

THERE GOES THE BRIDE
Making Up Your
Mind, Calling It Off,
and Moving On

by Rachel Safier with
Wendy Roberts, LCSW

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CINDERELLA DREAMS
The Allure of the
Lavish Wedding

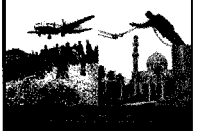
by Cele C. Otnes and
Elizabeth H. Pleck

University of
California Press

America's Role in Nation-Building From Germany to Iraq

AMERICA'S ROLE IN NATION-BUILDING

FROM GERMANY TO IRAQ



who wishes to understand or engage in such activities."

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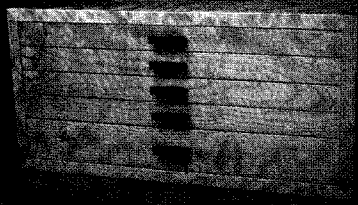
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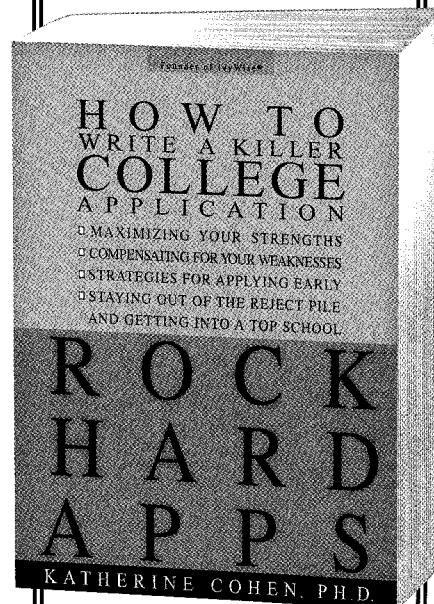


TAPESTRY HANDBAGS

(How can anyone who loves movies—or who possesses even a passing fondness for them—write of *The Philadelphia Story* that it “demonstrated its ability to perform cultural work by legitimizing the wearing of a designer lavish wedding gown”?) The best part of this discussion concerns the long-standing movie tradition of depicting brides who bolt from extravagant weddings, which are often associated with drained passion and stuffed-shirt grooms. It was only when I saw a list of such movies—from *It Happened One Night* (which Pauline Kael memorably described as “the *Annie Hall* of its day—before the invention of anxiety”) and that great cultural workhorse *The Philadelphia Story* to *The Graduate* and *Private Benjamin* to contemporary schlock like *Runaway Bride* and *The Wedding Planner*—that I realized how often I had seen such a story. Indeed, the formal white wedding tends to conjure in the imagination not romance but, rather, its deadly opposite. In the aforementioned issue of *Martha Stewart Weddings*, alongside features about how to register for table linens and the advisability of throwing a reception at the Wyndham El Conquistador Resort in Las Croabas, Puerto Rico, is a page of black-and-white photographs featuring a couple who got married in New York’s City Hall. “They kept it almost as small as the law would allow,” we learn of the couple, whom we see standing before a justice of the peace, the bride in an ivory shift, her groom in civvies. The photographs are riveting; they seem to suggest, in a way that no carefully staged event can, all the things most alluring about a wedding: youth and impulsivity, and the power of nothing more than a spoken promise to change the course of two lives. I thought they were on to something, those two, and my hat was off to them for hitting upon the next new thing. But the forces of the wedding industry are powerful. I was disappointed to learn that the city-hall couple eventually cracked: two months after their wedding they hosted a reception for 200 guests. ▀

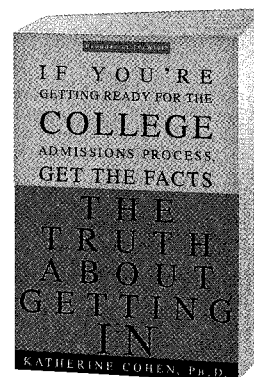
Caitlin Flanagan has been a contributing editor of *The Atlantic* since 2002. She is at work on a book about modern motherhood.

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PRINCESS OF DISCRIMINATION

Shirley Hazzard's masterly descriptions and expertly drawn characters are in full evidence in this new novel—her first in more than twenty years

BY THOMAS MALLON

.....

It is said of a minor character in Shirley Hazzard's masterpiece, *The Transit of Venus* (1980), that "although she offered few opinions, her views were known in a way that is not true of persons who, continually passing judgment, keep none in reserve." One feels much the same about this nonprolific author, now past seventy and giving us, in *The Great Fire*, her first novel in twenty-three years and only her sixth work of fiction ever.

THE GREAT FIRE

by Shirley Hazzard
Farrar, Straus & Giroux

Most of Hazzard's oeuvre consists of slender volumes that once sold in hardback for as little as \$3.95: her Italian romances of Jamesian sorrow and subtlety, *The Evening of the Holiday* (1966) and *The Bay of Noon* (1970); short-story collections minutely observant (*Cliffs of Fall*, 1963) and poignantly satirical (*People in Glass Houses*, 1967). For years her admirers have been awaiting what would be next, begrudging Hazzard even the time she spent on a brief memoir of her friendship with Graham Greene. (Why should this princess of reticence and discrimination expend effort on that voluble lout, who discovered his real genre in the angry letter to the editor?) Now Hazzard has at last, in the language of birth and publishing, delivered, and if *The Great Fire* lacks the astonishing densities of *The Transit of Venus* (a novel that, in its own astronomical terms, was really more like a swirling asteroid belt of connected stories), it still streaks through a reader's ken in the manner of a comet, quickly seizing the attention and emotions before disappearing, trailed by hopes for the characters' happiness—which, like a comet's return, the reader only half believes in.

Hazzard's new hero is Aldred Leith, thirty-two years old in 1947, a twice wounded British army major marked by a "strain of fatalism" and the tendency to be "exasperated by unsolicited emotion." Leith grew up the son of a

well-known novelist, and the amicable conclusion of his brief, almost inadvertent wartime marriage has left him to the pursuit of his own literary project, commissioned by the army in 1945: an account of travels through China that will convey the "consequences of war within an ancient and vanishing society" from

the point of view of someone "not a spy, not a sociologist, beholden to no one."

Leith has decided to add Japan to his itinerary and ruminations, and so finds himself, in the spring of '47, in some hills above Kure, not far from Hiroshima, on the grounds of a hospital administered by a cruel Australian brigadier named Barry

duce two enchantingly sensitive children, Benedict and Helen, "a frail and remarkable young son, and a little girl who is a changeling," as Leith describes them in a letter to his friend Peter Exley.

At twenty, Benedict Driscoll is "hunched and angular" with Friedreich's ataxia, a neurological disease that is hustling him to an early death. Amusingly learned and altogether precocious, he is blessed with the cheerful, complete devotion of his sister, who is just as bright and not yet seventeen: "It was as if, in [Helen], Benedict had been re-created in radiant health, the hair made glossy, the skin vital, the form sound. With a second try, Nature had pulled it off." When Leith entertains these delicate captives with tales of war and travel, he seems like an older, phlegmatic Peter Pan among the Darling children. "My apparent role is avuncular," he tells Exley, though in fact, as he admits, it's actually Benedict who has become the sympathetic guardian of the other two, shielding the obvious and supremely inconvenient love that has sprung up between Leith and Helen.

Thanks to her, Leith's fatalism has been replaced by "a great desire to live completely." Helen has rescued him from "becoming formidable," convinced him he must now "get used to joy," even in the face of the malevolent elder Driscolls, who soon decide to thwart "The Baby Snatcher" (Leith's new nickname around the hospital compound) by spiriting Helen off to New Zealand and sending Benedict away for treatment that is both cutting-edge and hopeless.

Some readers may end up feeling that *The Great Fire* cheats them of a climactic conflagration. But Hazzard is less concerned with people's blow-ups than she is with the silent, totalitarian rule of enforced distance and disapproved desire. It's the smoke, not the fire, that kills most of us, and readers of this novel will never know for sure whether its ending signals a redemption or merely a respite. One remembers, as a caution, how *The Transit of Venus* was, in the strictest sense of its celestial title, about



Driscoll, whose bullying rage soon leads to the suicide of a Japanese underling. Driscoll is assisted by an almost equally dreadful wife named Melba—whose chilling depiction joins those of Dora, from *The Transit of Venus*, and Norah, from *The Bay of Noon*, in this author's Dickensian gallery of crimped female monsters. The mystery of the Driscolls lies in how they have managed to pro-

the way people perish from an inability to sustain their sudden, improbable alignments.

The story of Peter Exley, Leith's loyal, gentle confidant, seems both discrete from and connected to the rest of the book, as if by a kind of war-induced displacement. The reader loses track of the character for a while, and then seizes upon his reappearance once narrative communications have been restored. Exley's soulful nature and artistic bent have survived boyhood in Australia, where typically a "panic-stricken ribaldry [was] passed off as virility, authenticity." Now in Hong Kong, he works at moving some Japanese war-crimes defendants to trial, even as he "despair[s] of justice" and has "dreams of tenderness in love, as others might dream its eroticism." His physical health and emotional life come to a crisis when he assists a sick Chinese child whom others won't touch.

Warmer and less self-possessed than Leith (and in some ways an easier figure for a reader to love), Exley is the novel's chief subsidiary character; but the numerous others are expertly drawn—as in *The Transit of Venus*, a novel that, like this one, accrued slowly from stories published at long intervals. In *The Great Fire*, tales of the Italian sisters courted by Leith before the Second World War, or of Miss Fry, the New Zealand spinster whose fiancé was lost in the First, may seem like set pieces, reminiscent of the shorter stories of Alice Munro, but Hazzard typically reconnects the episodes, sometimes by surprise, to the main narrative.

Hazzard's fiction has always been marked by such precise lyricism and emotional microscopy that it's been easy to overlook her gifts for aphorism ("Nothing creates such untruth in you as the wish to please") and laugh-out-loud skewering ("For Paul, sincerity was something to fall back on when other methods flagged"). None of her books gives freer rein to these talents than *People in Glass Houses*, her volume of stories about the bureaucrats of the United Nations.

Millicent's only idea of dignity was standing on it.

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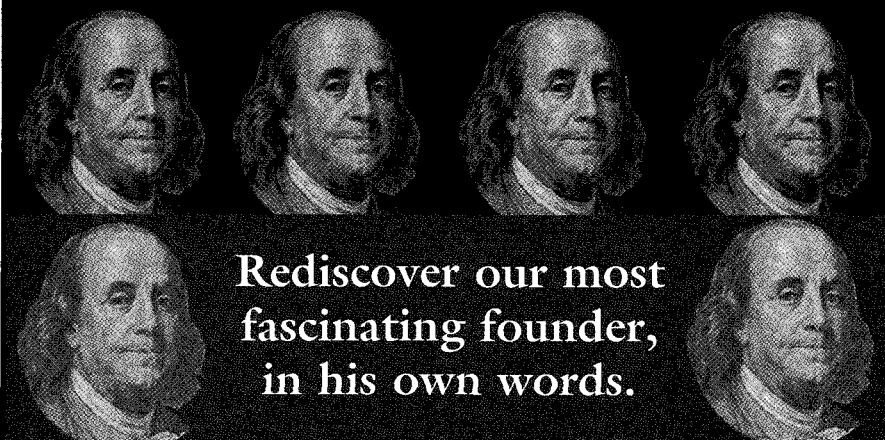


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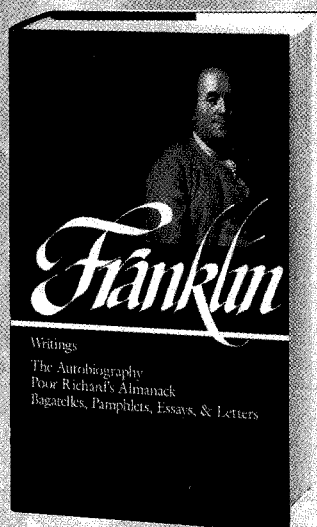


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Swoboda was not a brilliant man. He was a man of what used to be known as average and is now known as above-average intelligence.

Mr. Bekkus stared. Regaining the power of speech, he said, "Words fail me." (A poor workman will tend to blame his tools.)

Given the one recent encouraging development in bookselling—the way even out-of-print titles remain forever available through outfits like Abebooks.com—I shall have failed as a reviewer if a few dozen copies of *People in Glass Houses* haven't been grabbed back through the fiber-optic ether before the month is out.

The Great Fire is not without these pleasurable satirical piercings; for instance, "[The Driscoll parents are] disquieting as a symptom of new power: that Melba and Barry should be in the ascendant was not what one had hoped from peace. It did not even seem a cessation of hostilities." But conveyance of its meanings depends more often on Hazzard's descriptions of circumstance and setting. Hong Kong provides the author with some of her best opportunities. The city's harbor, struggling back to life after the war, is "an old photograph, a resumption." Its impoverished alleys contain "great clots and blobs of tubercular spittle shot with blood, unavoidable underfoot," while the colony's better-off English, superbly typified, return to life in Hazzard's pages. One sees

[the] colonial women, limp or hearty, filmed with perspiration. The houseguest out from Britain—some boy like a lily, or the strapping daughter of a retired colonel. Lace mats on mahogany, Georgian silver. Hunting prints, foxed, on humid walls. The starved servant holding the platter. The colonel's daughter remarking, "They all have those marvellous teeth, it must be the rice."

The satisfactions here are more straightforward than those of *The Transit of Venus*, a novel stuffed with description so intellectually active as to be sometimes exhausting, as if metaphysical verse were presenting itself to the reader as prose.

"All speech is an exposure," Hazzard writes in this new book, some of whose dialogue—Benedict's conversational declaration that "there had been, in my father, some conclusive submis-

sion to my mother, embitterment towards me"—may strike one as bordering on the precious or implausible. But in fact it never forces a suspension of disbelief, because Hazzard's narration is more articulate than almost anything we're now accustomed to reading: what's within quotation marks seems credible simply by the standard of what's without. Also, one should remember that Benedict and Helen "live in literature and make free with it"—something true for most of the characters we care about in Hazzard's books. Poetry, quoted by one to another, is coin of the emotional realm; in this new novel, two different sets of characters recognize their kinship when they see they're holding the same book.

Hazzard's fiction has always been marked by such precise lyricism and emotional microscopy that it's been easy to overlook her gifts for aphorism and laugh-out-loud skewering.

Just as Hazzard moves with great speed and no obvious effort between thoughts unspoken and thoughts expressed, she is comfortable making fast narrative forays into the future, either by direct statement ("Throughout the coming months of their acquaintance, Captain Dench never did look Major Leith in the eye") or by the nearly unnoticed insinuation of a later era's perspective: one character nearing forty won't have a baby because "it was held to be dangerous." Hazzard has always set the clock and calibrated the scales according to her own measure, allowing herself to perform whatever tricks of time and proportion she wished: the brilliant telegraphing of an airplane crash at the end of *The Transit of Venus*; the confinement of a crucial sexual encounter to the blank space between Chapters 7 and 8 of *The Evening of the Holiday*; the similarly parenthetical recognition of the romantic love that *The Bay of Noon's* heroine has for her brother, as if the narrative reticence were an index of the character's efforts at self-control. In *The Great Fire* the war seems to do the novelist's work of upending time and space: when Leith goes

home to England, he experiences "mingled sensations of estrangement and belonging, which for the time being conferred exemption."

However narrow her immediate focus, Hazzard's vision has always been global and historical. It has also been tragic. *The Great Fire's* title links London's seventeenth-century inferno to the Blitz and Hiroshima, and stands for the whole war that split the past century in two. The "loss and disruption" that Aldred Leith takes for the theme of his written work have become "pervasive now throughout the world." Those same crushing phenomena motivated Shirley Hazzard's decade of service (1952–1962) at the United Nations, an experience that led her to write not only the amusing

stories of *People in Glass Houses* but also a bitterly disappointed nonfiction book called *Defeat of an Ideal* (1973): "The energy expended [at the UN] in explaining not only why nothing can be done, but why doing nothing is the only constructive course, might, if differently directed, have moved mountains." Leith thinks of how the "entire world ... needs comforting," whereas the UN—in an unimprovable phrase from Hazzard's institutional autopsy—went about "demanding a bedside manner from the world."

Compared with that enterprise, the writing life must have seemed the life of action and honesty, a real vocation for what would, to any of the war's survivors, be forever an aftermath. One thinks of Peter Exley, not yet at the worst of his despair, trying to stiffen his will by reflecting on what he still has left: "Truthfulness was his last whole good, the thing he had not sheltered or kept small for safety. He had brought it out of the fire"—out of the worldwide blaze that forged this fine new novel and the lambent life's work of Shirley Hazzard. ▀

Thomas Mallon is a contributing editor of The Atlantic. His new novel, Bandbox, will be published in January.

NEW PERSPECTIVES on Public Life ...

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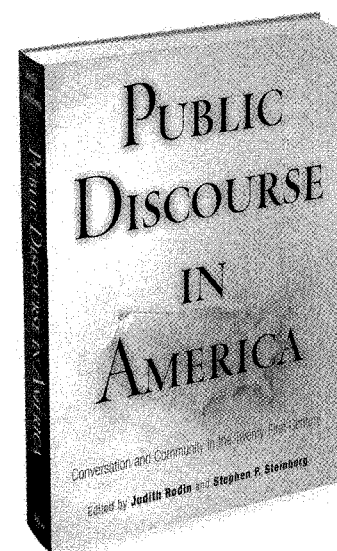
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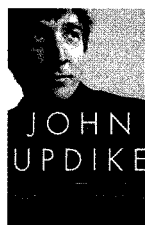
At 864 pages, 103 stories, and roughly three pounds, this volume, which collects almost all the short stories from the approximate first half of John Updike's writing life, is a testament to many things, not least Updike's prodigious work habits (reputedly three pages a day, six days a week). But what makes this collection more than the standard anthology accorded the magisterial (or dead) literary figure is that twenty-two years' worth of stories have been arranged in a fictive chronology that tracks Updike's protagonists from adolescence to middle age. The result is not only that these disparate stories find their place as part of larger narratives but also that Updike's artistry—normally glimpsed in sections, like a person through window slats—is wholly and deeply seen. Or, to put it in pop-culture terms, this is the boxed set.

And, as music lovers know, much can be learned or relearned by experiencing a familiar artist's work this way. Among the more trenchant reminders here is that early Updike, as in his Olinger stories of the late 1950s and early 1960s, was very, very good, in possession of a subtly ominous metaphysical bent that wouldn't emerge again as effectively until his stories about divorce and single life a decade later. Another is that Updike stood almost alone among the writers of his time in not thinking that suburban Americans were uninteresting or insipid, and in never mistaking the inhabitants for the surroundings. But the overarching (and somewhat depressing) conclusion is that Updike is one of the few American authors for whom writerly craft remains the essence of fiction. Though his aesthetic occasionally traffics in the obscure, far more often his filigreed sentences remind us what an outright pleasure it is to engage the refined sensibility of a writer who attempts to reflect on things in an interesting way

instead of thinking himself interesting because of what he reflects on. Indeed, these older stories resolutely affirm that no one so frequently wrings elegies from the ordinary as Updike (for proof, reread "Plumbing," "The Day of the Dying Rabbit," or the exquisite "Wife-Wooing").

Given that Updike's characters have been intermittently parading before us for half a century, it's also intriguing here to witness the fuller scope of their development. As the chronology unspools, we see the stories trade some of their earlier grit for a psychological quiescence, and begin to float upward in meaning even as their characters spiral down. As Updike's protagonists struggle with family doings, the ruinous effects of children on marriage, and (with acrimony giving way to adultery and then divorce) the desultory single life, they begin taking off from increasingly idiosyncratic points of departure, moving from the head-on view of things to other preoccupations—museums, solitaire, leaves. (As the narrator in "Leaves" muses, "I am surrounded by leaves. The oak's are lobed paws of tenacious rust; the elm's, scant feathers of a feminine yellow; the sumac's, a savage, toothed blush. I am upheld in a serene and burning universe of leaves. Yet something plucks me back, returns me to that inner darkness where guilt is the sun.") We also see the use of the first person, prevalent early, gloomily reappear in the *après-mariage* pieces, at just about the time one of Updike's great concerns—religious faith—begins to materialize. Another reminder from this collection: for all the notoriety Updike has reaped for writing about sex (or, more precisely, adultery), some of his most affecting prose has been about the Protestant faith, the negotiation of which gives the first theme its potency.

Yes, there are less-than-successful stories here. There's a perceptible fade in a spate of them near the end (some of the "Far Out" stories show that Updike was not immune to 1970s trends in meta-fiction); but given that this collection sums up only the first half of a career, one can view that fade as the well-deserved pause at the midpoint of a commanding literary marathon. In the meantime,



JOHN UPDIKE
THE EARLY STORIES
1953–1975

by John Updike
Knopf

one reads through the plenitude with delight, expectation, and at all times gratitude. —SCOTT SHIBUYA BROWN

THE STORY OF A WAR

.....

In their coverage of Operation Iraqi Freedom last spring, embedded reporters provided vertical depth but little horizontal scope. Profound portraits of individual soldiers and units were rarely complemented by competent narratives placing the various military operations in the context of a grand strategic view. That is the job not of war correspondents or even of military experts but of military *historians*. Williamson Murray, a senior fellow at the Institute of Defense Analysis, and Major General Robert H. Scales Jr., a former commandant of the Army War College, fill the void. Rarely is a quickie book this finely written and subtly thought through. There will be better, fuller descriptions of last spring's war, but none will frame the debate in a way that's both so timely and so economical.

The authors begin with the Gulf War of 1991, which, they note, marked the first time since the Korean War that the United States military fought at the "operational level," meaning at the theater level of command. The rustiness showed, and contributed to the fact that brilliant battlefield tactics failed to produce a strategic victory: Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime remained in power. In this second Gulf war, twelve years later, the operational performance was vastly improved, largely because of the "fertile minds" of three men: Army General Gary Luck, Marine General Anthony Zinni, and Army General Tommy Franks. Whereas Franks orchestrated last spring's war, it was Luck and Zinni who, in the years between the two Gulf wars, began the process at Central Command of turning service-oriented headquarters into joint commands, taking advantage of breakthroughs in



THE IRAQ WAR
A Military History

by Williamson Murray and Major General Robert H. Scales Jr.
Harvard University Press

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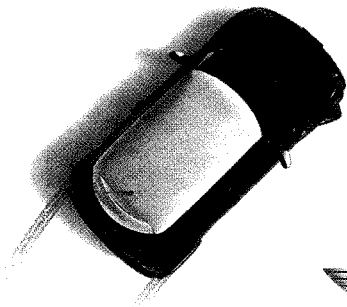
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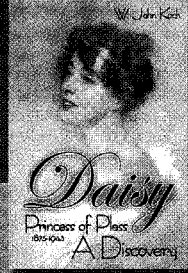
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communications and systems analysis. Without that, Franks's battlefield symphony would have been impossible. Franks's campaign was fluent and flexible enough to overcome what the authors believe was a major flaw in pre-war analysis: the failure to recognize the incredible depth of behavioral control that the Baathist regime maintained over its population.

It turns out that many of the Fedayeen Saddam, the paramilitary group behind the guerrilla attacks against American forces, were not Iraqis at all but fanatics from Syria, Tunisia, and other places in the Muslim world. According to the authors, Saddam's sons, Qusay and Uday, were "intrigued by the apparent success of Somali 'technical'" against the Americans: thus they designed Fedayeen units after Somali ones, with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades mounted on pickups and SUVs. The authors provide a clear description of Fedayeen ambush and concealment tactics, much of which got lost in the heady, atmospheric reporting of last spring.

The book also provides newly disclosed information about the killing of Saddam's sons and about the underrated role in the war of the U.S. Navy and of the Saudis, too, who provided the coalition with extensive command-and-control facilities. Many of the round-the-clock aerial refueling operations were conducted from Saudi bases. Meanwhile, the Romanians provided a forward operating base on the Black Sea for American Special Forces teams, which prowled Iraq's western desert for Scud missiles. As for the British effort, the authors write that the performance of the British First Armoured Division in southern Iraq showed that allies can still "fight effectively alongside the technologically advanced military forces of the United States," and within our "doctrinal framework."

The authors are unambiguous in their belief that ultimate victory in Iraq can be had only by concentrating on how America's "low-tech enemies define victory and defeat"—an exercise that, in turn, requires cultural and historical knowledge much more than it does gee-whiz technology. They also

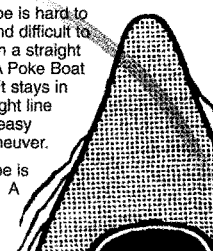
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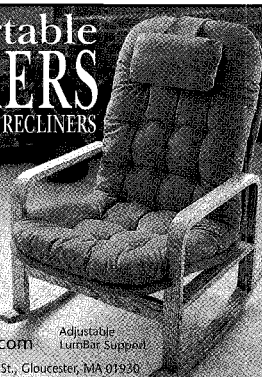
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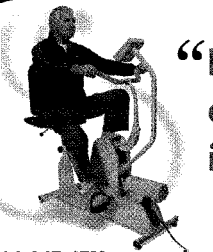
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point out that the “modern battlefield continues to empty and expand,” so it is characterized by dispersion. Given the success of terrorists in turning postwar Iraq into an exercise yard for unconventional, economy-of-force attacks over a vast area, carried out by small teams and lone suicide bombers, the authors have already proved prescient.

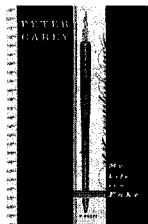
—ROBERT D. KAPLAN

FABULOUS FORGERIES

.....

The title of Peter Carey's new novel invites a question. *My Life as a Fake*—but whose? The phrase could apply to almost any character here, starting with his principal narrator: Sarah Wode-Douglass, alias Micks, the unobtrusively cagey editor of an English poetry magazine. On a British Council junket in Kuala Lumpur, she finds a “white man with ulcers on his legs” sitting up over a volume of Rilke in a bicycle-repair shop. His name is Christopher Chubb, and Micks soon learns the public part of his history. At the end of World War II he perpetrated a great literary hoax, creating an imaginary poet named Bob McCorkle out of the tag ends of modernist obscurity and persuading an Australian literary magazine that it had found a new wonder. That hoax is the one part of this buoyant black comedy that's *not* a fake: Carey has stolen it, lifting its details and even a few actual poems from the Ern Malley affair of 1944, in which a couple of literary conservatives ran up some gobbledygook and got an avant-garde journal to take it.

There's lots in *My Life as a Fake* for scholars to have fun with—questions about identity and authenticity and the cultural anxieties of a colonial society. But Carey's hand is as light as a pick-pocket's, and unless you're looking for such things, you won't see them at all; certainly there's less here of obvious weight than in this Australian writer's last novel, the Booker Prize-winning *True History of the Kelly Gang*. Carey's



MY LIFE AS
A FAKE

by Peter Carey
Knopf

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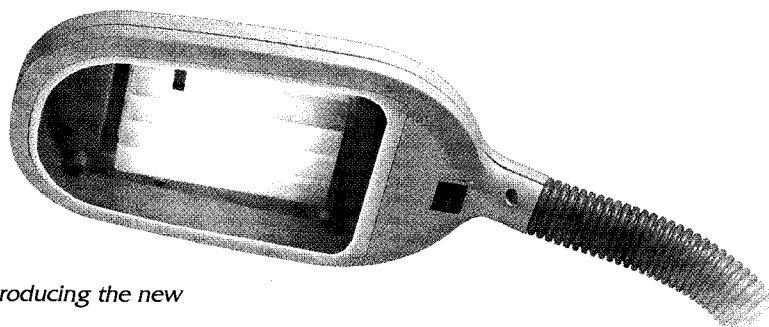
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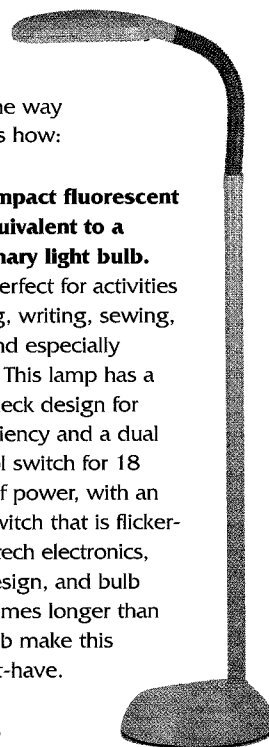
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own forgeries really take off with the story Chubb tells about what happened after the hoax. A seven-foot giant claiming to be Bob McCorkle himself begins to invade his life, and eventually kidnaps his daughter; it's the only way, this putative fraud says, to give himself the childhood that Chubb's act of fakery has denied him. Somebody here must be mad—but who? Carey writes without quotation marks, so Micks's voice melts into Chubb's, and then Chubb's dissolves into those of the novel's other speakers, whose tales are framed by his own. This hall of mirrors reads like the impossible offspring of a fictional ménage à trois involving *Pale Fire*, *Lord Jim*, and *Our Man in Havana*.

At some point Micks, or Chubb, or maybe the narrative itself, seems to step off the edge, like a cartoon character who then treads air. But Carey never lets anything fall, and he pitches us into an entirely implausible and yet compelling tale in which Chubb follows the giant to Malaysia and on into a world of pirates, snakes, Japanese atrocities, poisoned melons, feudal rivalries, boarding schools, demons, bugs, and a carefully preserved manuscript seemingly left by the imaginary McCorkle himself—the work of a man determined to name the world, a poet who looks to have “ripped up history and nailed it back together with its viscera on the outside.” Will Micks get to publish it? The answer hardly matters. This is a fabulous book in the original sense of the term—and in the other one, too. —MICHAEL GORRA

Recent books by *Atlantic* authors:

The Boy Who Loved Windows: Opening the Heart and Mind of a Child Threatened With Autism, by Patricia Stacey. Da Capo Press. This book grew out of Stacey's article “Floor Time,” in the January/February *Atlantic*.

The Flickering Mind: The False Promise of Technology in the Classroom and How Learning Can Be Saved, by Todd Oppenheimer. Random House. This book grew out of Oppenheimer's article “Schooling the Imagination,” which appeared in *The Atlantic* in September of 1999.

THEIR SHOW OF SHOWS

*Backstage with a troubled,
now legendary Sondheim musical*

BY CORBY KUMMER

.....

Last spring, as I left a Chicago theater where a new musical had just previewed, I saw Stephen Sondheim, who wrote the score, walk jauntily down the street with John Weidman, who wrote the book. The musical was called *Bounce*, but it might as well have been called *The New Sondheim Show*. Harold Prince, the director, had just ducked into a car after huddling in a hallway with members of the production staff. Everyone looked revved up, ready to spend an hour—or all night—working on the problems the performance had brought out. In show business, this process is synonymous with hell. “If Hitler’s alive,” the playwright Larry Gelbart is often quoted as saying, “I hope he’s out of town with a musical.” But Sondheim and Prince, who are both in their seventies, looked positively rejuvenated.

This was, of course, akin to spotting Picasso and Braque on their way to a Montmartre studio to rethink Cubism—though given the relatively modest ambitions of the show, which the collaborators repeatedly said wants to do nothing more than entertain, it was doubtful that Sondheim and Weidman were off to alter the face of an art form. Still, as I watched them disappear into a nondescript hotel, I felt sure they would be making some sort of history.

Thirty years ago, before Sondheim and Prince were faces on Mount Rushmore (as a cast member of *Bounce* kept calling them in interviews), they were restless men just entering their forties who had achieved an extraordinary amount in less than two decades. They knew every square inch of musical comedy, and they wanted to change it. In *Company* and *Follies*, two collaborations that, amazingly, reached Broadway less than a year apart, Sondheim, Prince, and the late choreographer-director Michael Bennett treated subjects that



musical theater had never dealt with before—fear of emotional commitment and the rough and tumble of marriage in *Company*, fear of aging and facing up to the mistakes of youth in *Follies*—in ways that brought new depth and resilience to a form widely thought to be in its death throes. In *Everything Was Possible*, Ted Chapin shows what it was like to be around them when they did it.

Sondheim and Prince, the pathbreakers who would bring about a revolution, turned out to be sui generis. However exciting their innovations, they would spark no new golden age of the kind that formed them, perhaps

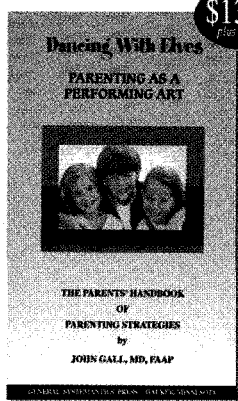
because they were innovating almost alone. Yet seeing *Company* and *Follies* did change many lives. Sondheim has received every cultural award this country bestows, and is the subject of several worshipful Web sites; his brilliance is by now a given. At the time it still had the force of a slap.

Sondheim’s lyrics mixed jaded sophistication with global yearning, cocksure confidence with raw vulnerability and hope almost too painful to express. He spoke directly to adolescents, that is, and with an urgency and fiendish cleverness several steps ahead of all those who aspired to be a part of New York life. Sondheim had been an especially brilliant adolescent himself—one

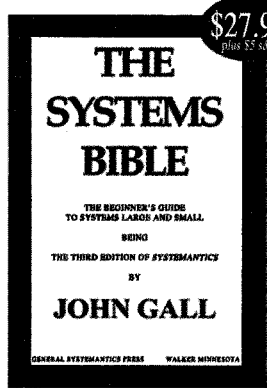
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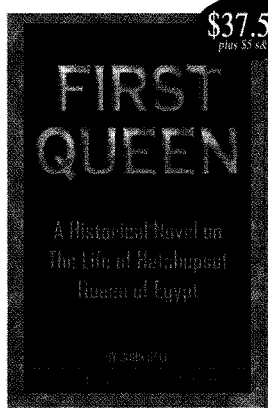
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who had the good fortune to be taken under the wing of the lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II, who became both tutor and surrogate father to him. His lyrics for his first produced shows, *West Side Story* and *Cypsy*, made poetry of the anger and lonely longing of youth, and he was always unusually supportive of young people. In the late 1970s he conceived of the Young Playwrights Festival, and he helped advance the careers of many fledgling composers, including Jonathan Larson, who sent him the first draft of *Rent*. In the recent *Camp*, a movie about gifted, mostly misfit teenagers at a musical-theater camp, Sondheim is the reigning god, an icon whose handsome photograph appears on one camper's nightstand and who actually appears at a finale benefit performance. He does this sort of thing often in real life—though presumably not trailed by the screaming young people who in the film dog his every step and are subdued only by his disappearance through glass doors.

Sondheim is a famously responsive and acute correspondent. I was one of many beneficiaries of this generosity, when I was starting high school and the Broadway productions of *Company* and *Follies* imprinted themselves indelibly on my consciousness. Ted Chapin, whose parents were members of Sondheim's social circle, was also deeply imprinted by *Company* ("Suddenly there seemed to be an interesting future for the musical theater"), and he, too, received gently acerbic letters from Sondheim. But he actually experienced what the many young people who had already formed a pre-Web Sondheim cult could only dream of: becoming general factotum to Sondheim, Prince, and all the other creators of *Follies* during its rehearsals and through its opening. Chapin was then a Connecticut College junior uncertain about his future, though he knew he wanted somehow to be in the theater. He came up with the idea of turning rehearsal observations into a thesis, and largely because of his family connections he secured Prince's consent. Three decades later Chapin, who is now the director of the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization, a bland-sounding group that is central to the

production of musical theater all over the country, went back to his notes, re-interviewed Sondheim, and wrote his account.

In *Everything Was Possible*, Chapin manages to be at once the starry-eyed, insecure, yet remarkably precise observer he was then and the seasoned theater professional he is now. The book is a behind-the-scenes chronicle of a landmark artistic collaboration, and also an education in the business of Broadway. Reading it will be a pleasure for anyone interested in the theater, and thrilling to anyone who has ever heard himself in a Sondheim song—thrilling enough to make it impossible to resent the connections that got the author his catbird seat.

Follies was meant to be lethally seductive. The original plan, as conceived by Sondheim and James Goldman, the author of *The Lion in Winter* and other historical plays and films, was a mystery set at a theatrical reunion in which all the main characters have motives to kill another—not a whodunit but a who'll-do-it, Sondheim explained. An actual murder might have been pleasanter than what remained after five years and nearly a dozen drafts by Goldman: two middle-aged couples attending a last reunion of surviving cast members of between-the-wars follies, who hate their lives, their mates, and themselves. The trappings were splendid: ghostly show girls in beaded, jeweled, and plumed costumes; a vast, multilevel set representing a half-wrecked theater that in the final sequence—a dark-night-of-the-soul follies in which the four main characters confront their past and present selves in various stages of breakdown—becomes magnificently gaudy. But for all the splendor, and the fantastically accomplished pastiche songs Sondheim composed, the dominant themes were disillusion and decay, with barely a gesture toward redemption or rebirth. It's hard to imagine how anyone thought the show could make any money; it closed after running a bit over a year, at a loss of its entire investment.

Yet of all Sondheim's musicals, with their parade of legendary collaborators, *Follies* in its original staging is the



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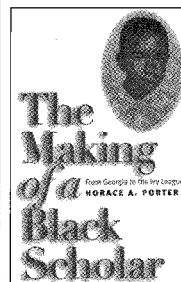
Illustration by Marty Blake

one most fans would choose to see if offered time travel. It is often called the most overwhelming—even the greatest—production ever of a Broadway musical. This is because of the sheer talent of its creators, all at the height of their powers, and the huge orchestra and cast and the lavish costumes, all of which would be economically unfeasible today. But mostly it is because of Bennett's choreography, which surpassed his work on *A Chorus Line*, the musical he created four years later. (Bennett died at forty-four; Chapin reports his saying that he so feared aging—he was then twenty-eight—that he hoped he would die before he turned forty-five.) Although *A Chorus Line* is thought to be his masterpiece, his work in *Follies* was wedded to ideas that had shading and ambivalence, Sondheim's favorite emotion, rather than the straightforward, heart-on-leotard emotions of *A Chorus Line*.

The Bennett sequence that those who experienced it would do anything to see again is "Who's That Woman?," a rueful, 1940s Hollywood-style song in which a blowsy dame sings of not wanting to recognize the woman she sees in the mirror. As the former follies girls gamely go into their original tap dance, laughing off forgotten steps and enjoying themselves for the first time since the party began, their young selves enter mysteriously from far upstage and rat-tat the steps the older women cannot hope to perform—first dancing with and then relentlessly engulfing them. It is a tumultuous, terrifying, unforgettable number.

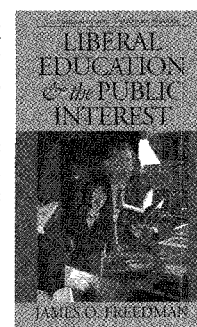
Everyone knew it would stop the show, and Bennett knew, Chapin reports, that teaching such difficult steps to the dancers, young and old, would require him to start rehearsing them on the very first day. But when it came to matters beyond the decrepitude of age confronted by the unstoppable, unreflective power of youth, Bennett—who was a generation younger than Sondheim, Goldman, and Prince—disagreed with his co-creators. This was a potentially fatal sign. Chief among those out-of-town problems Gelbart wished on Hitler is when collaborators aren't working on the same show—meaning their conceptions of it diverge.

IOWA EDUCATION



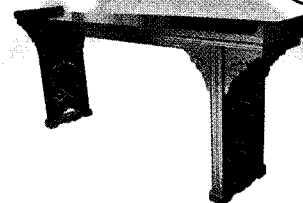
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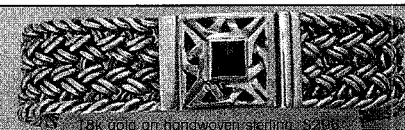
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Chapin saw the problem too. Even with three decades' worth of hindsight and *Follies* legend to draw on, he admirably doesn't second-guess his younger self. But he does quote at length from a summary of his feelings about the show that he wrote as the first preview drew near. He feared that the show would be attacked for coldness at its heart—and it was. The received opinion was that Goldman's book sank *Follies*, and every other part was brilliant. Since no other part would have existed without the book, which—unusually for a musical—was not based on source material, Sondheim and Prince always defended it. Its themes of rue and misplaced nostalgia, they said, were exactly what interested them. But those themes didn't interest Bennett, who feared that the inert contemporary story would lose audiences. Even if he was right, his solution—to call in Neil Simon, then the secret-weapon show doctor of choice, to throw in some jokes—was crude. Fifteen years later Goldman rewrote the book for a London revival that turned near-nihilism into defanged and not very funny drawing-room comedy. Sondheim barred the London version from ever being presented in America.

Follies was courageous for being disagreeable—a stance Sondheim never shied from, and one that continues to alienate many theatergoers from his work. In that diary entry Chapin laid out many of the problems to come.

I fear the show will be brilliant, funny, witty, full of adroit observant things, and yet cold. Will it appeal to those who adore Steve's work? Is that too small a group? Is the show, and the theater in general, a place for a small group of elitists to go to be amused or entertained? Can you try to teach things, even unpleasant things, to audiences who only want to be entertained?

The Sondheim cult would achieve critical mass. But three decades later the rest of the young diarist's questions are still unanswered.

Two years before *Follies* went into rehearsal, another observer left Broadway for dead. In *The Season: A Candid Look at Broadway*, the playwright and novelist William Goldman wrote what

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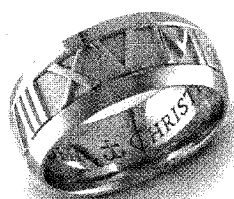
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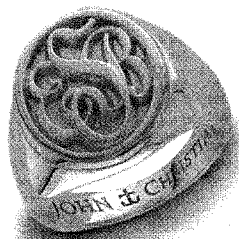
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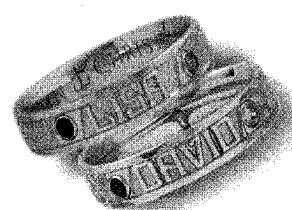
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still stands as the definitive explanation of how Broadway works and what goes wrong with most shows. As it happens, Goldman was the brother of James, and surely knew of the progress of what became *Follies* as he was writing, though he didn't mention it. I reread his book recently, and was amazed at how many phrases I remembered verbatim. Goldman is pitiless, leveling, to take just two examples, Clive Barnes (“who is *nothing* without the *Times*,” for which he was then the chief drama critic) and Mike Nichols (virtuosic but hopelessly “trivial”). His New Journalism-influenced style is still the punchy, wised-up voice of *Esquire* and *New York* magazine. Like Chapin, he began with a lifelong love of theater and a desire to understand it. But when he finished his chronicle, he declared defeat: the audience and the talent had gone to movies, and that's where he was going too. Goldman became very successful and wrote a similarly invaluable dissection of the movie business, *Adventures in the Screen Trade*. Yet *The Season* is a better and far more passionate book.

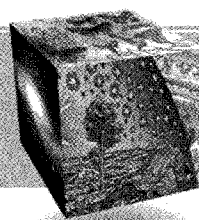
Chapin's ambitions were more modest than Goldman's, but *Everything Was Possible* offers instruction that will endure just as long: how sets and orchestras are placed in theaters, how productions are packed up and transported, how rehearsals are paced, how the duties of different production-staff members break down. His largest contribution is in describing how creative collaborations come to both greatness and grief. Though he knew just how narrow the field of the Broadway musical had become, Chapin stayed with it. Today, as custodian of a trove of the most popular musicals from Broadway's golden age, he tries to encourage new talent to reinterpret shows and attract new theatergoers.

“Teaching, I have said innumerable times, is the noblest profession on earth,” Sondheim told Mark Eden Horowitz, an interviewer from the Library of Congress, in 1997. The interview transcripts, assembled in *Sondheim on Music*, are the best primary source material on Sondheim, along with Craig Zadan's *Sondheim & Co.*, which was based on many interviews with Sondheim and

his collaborators. (Zadan was another young man whose life was changed by *Company* and *Follies*; he went on to produce a series of fresh reconceptions of musicals such as *Cinderella* and *Annie* for television, and his role as a prime force behind the recent film *Chicago* has prompted hopeful predictions of the return of the movie musical.) Sondheim's deep pleasure in explaining the creative process informs all these books. He speaks with extreme, even astonishing, clarity. Rather than the impenetrable academic studies that are becoming a dreary specialty, we could use an omnibus collection of Sondheim's interviews—especially the ones with Frank Rich, whose undergraduate review of *Follies* was the Boston notice the creative team took most closely to heart, and who has remained a devoted and perceptive Sondheim observer.

Everything Was Possible is a fast-paced account from someone whose head was bursting with all the new things he had learned, and he makes us just as excited to be learning what he did. In the book's most breathless passage Chapin—who is otherwise affectionate but comparatively cool—recalls every minute of the few hours in which he held the only copy of the lyrics of "I'm Still Here," the anthem of a battered veteran of not just show biz but life. The song, a last-minute replacement, was written out of town for Yvonne De Carlo (who conducted a Mob-tinged flirtation with the author, who was less than half her age—but for that you'll have to buy the book). No one else besides Sondheim had ever seen the lyrics! Chapin types line after line, marveling at the cleverness, the emotion, the greatness. His wonder at being present at the creation is exactly the wonder of the boy in *Pacific Overtures* who, in "Someone in a Tree," a trio with his older self and a warrior who claims to have been there too, sings of watching the negotiations for the Japanese treaty with Commodore Perry. "I'm a fragment of the day," one of them sings. "If I weren't, who's to say / Things would happen here the way / That they're happening?" Of course Sondheim had a song for it. **A**

Corby Kummer is a senior editor of *The Atlantic*.



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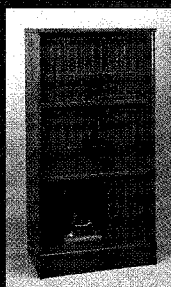
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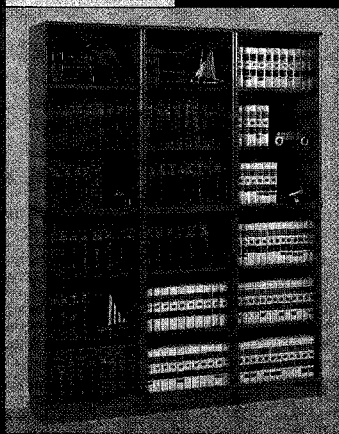
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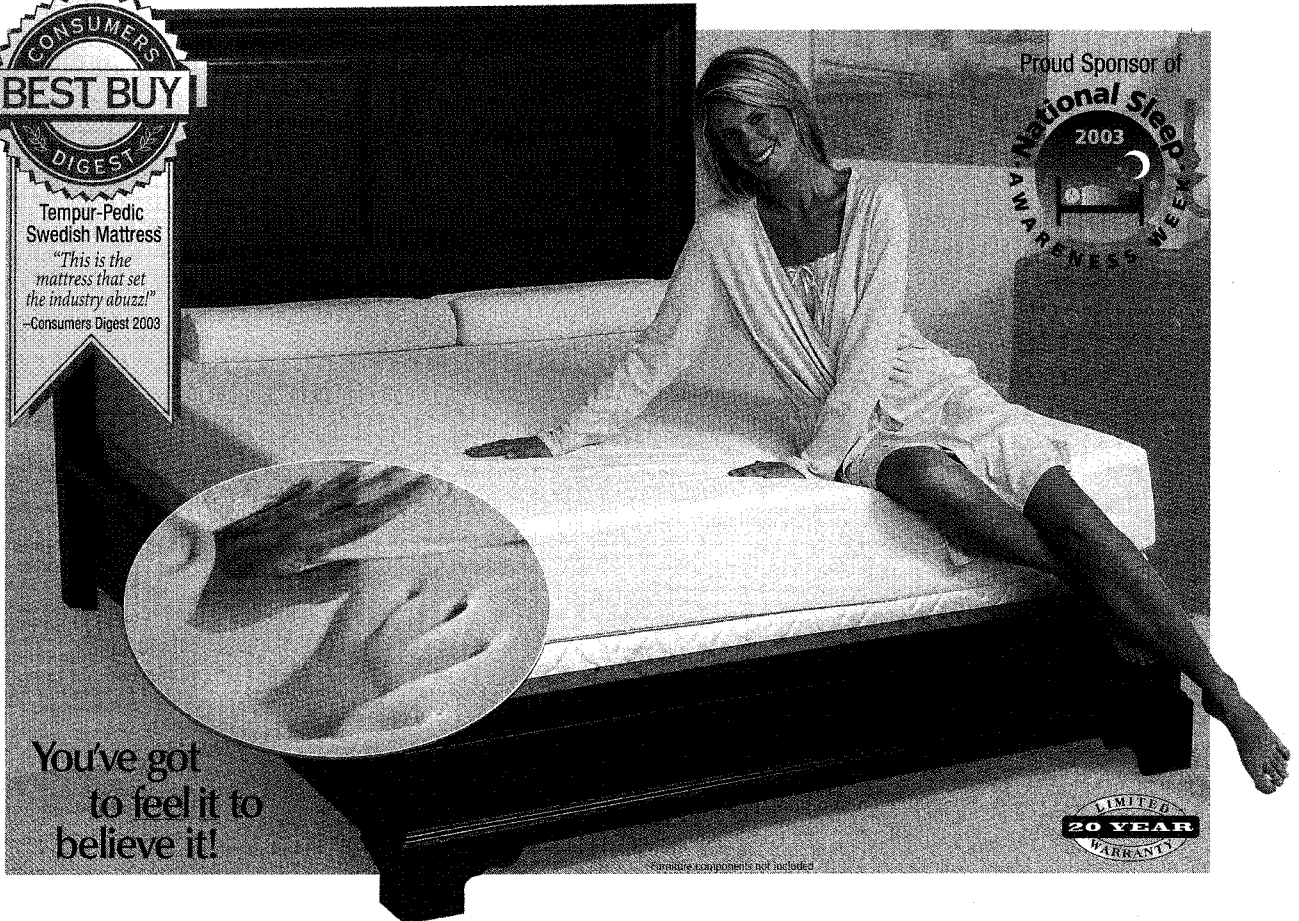
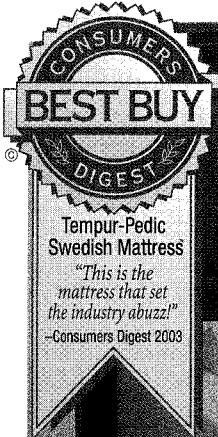
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THE PATH OF BRIGHTEOUSNESS

Godless Americans launch a semantic crusade

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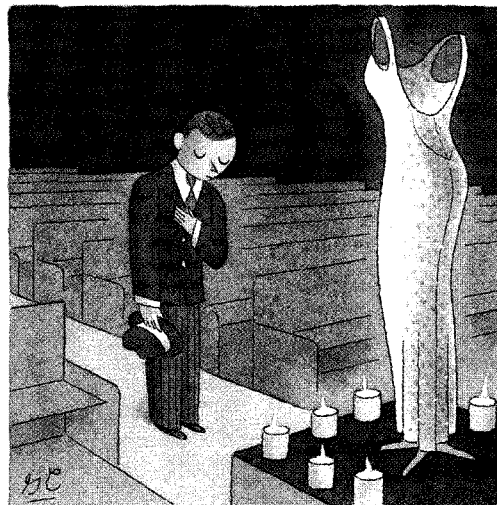
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“As with gays,” the British biologist Richard Dawkins observed recently in *The Guardian*, “the more brights come out, the easier it will be for yet more brights to do so.” Dawkins was writing in support of a proposed new sense of *bright*, as a synonym for *atheist*—a cause initially championed by Paul Geisert and Mynga Futrell, a couple in Sacramento. Geisert and Futrell, devout brights themselves, came up with the term after recoiling at the name of an event they had intended to participate in: “Godless Americans March on Washington.” They argue that having “a naturalistic world view that is free of supernatural or mystical elements” is regarded with suspicion in America, and that part of the problem is that our very vocabulary embodies a certain negativity: *godless*, *unbelief*, *nonreligious*, *atheistic*.

The brights have a point on the vocabulary issue. With the exception of *freethinker* and *secular humanist*, most of the words that connote the bright lifestyle have a reactive or pejorative cast to them. Think of *skeptic*, *infidel*, *dissenter*, *pagan*, *doubter*, *heathen*. I would point out for the record, though, that negative terminology aimed at religious people is more plentiful and more scornful: *zealot*, *dogmatist*, *Bible banger*, *Holy Roller*, *Bible bigot*, *Jesus freak*, *Bible thumper*, *knee bender*, *Bible basher*, *glory roader*, *Bible pounder*, *devil dodger*, *Holy Joe*.

Be that as it may, it will be instructive to see if *bright* catches on. It certainly addresses the negativity problem: as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has noted, “not incidentally, the word makes [atheists] all seem exceptionally smart.” Still,

the annals of semantic substitution of this sort—in which a name change is proposed for an entire group of people, and everyone goes along—are not voluminous. During the past few decades we have seen *gay* largely replace *homosexual*, and *Native American* replace *Indian*. *Underprivileged* has supplanted *poor people*. We no longer have *housewives*—we have *homemakers*.



Another thing to watch is the degree to which the brightness crusade itself begins to take on religious overtones. The line between the religious and the secular is often surprisingly indistinct, and even ruthlessly secularized activities can have a religious feel to them. People who shudder at the practice of spiritual counseling or ritual confession may have no qualms at all about therapy and psychoanalysis. Whatever the truth claims of religion, its forms of expression embody impulses and behaviors that are simply human.

For instance, “mortification of the

flesh,” through fasting and other forms of self-denial, has long been seen as a path toward purity and enlightenment, and religious ascetics have pursued it for centuries. Today the practice has a secular analogue. A recent article in the Styles section of *The New York Times* described a raft of stores, books, consultants, and resorts devoted to fasting. Special fasting spas in the desert can cost \$3,500 a week. The article recounted the ups and downs of one woman’s seven-day fast, a regimen that Saint Pachomius himself might nearly have sanctioned.

The fifth day, after drinking eight ounces of sesame seed oil as a “gall-bladder flush,” she became so nauseated that she considered going to an emergency room. But now, she said: “I feel great—just really light, so much energy, so optimistic. It’s really changed my frame of mind.” She did resume smoking, at five cigarettes a day.

Many religions keep lists of departed holy people—saints—who are held up for reverence. Of course, debates sometimes flare over who should or should not be on the list; some years ago Pope Paul VI dropped more than fifty saints from the official Catholic roster, including the popular Saint George and Saint Christopher, on the grounds that they probably never existed. The veneration of the morally exalted also obtains in the nonreligious sphere, where there is an actual category of “secular saints.” Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin, and George Orwell frequently receive this designation in print, though in some quarters the sanctity of Orwell, the secular Saint George, is viewed as suspiciously as the authenticity of the religious one. (From the *New Statesman*: “Orwell’s status as the secular saint of socialism is built on a myth.”) The ranks of secular saints, like

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"Spanning forty years, the letters collected here from Mileva Einstein, née Marić, to her best friend Helene Savić are unusual in their range and frankness. They evoke with unparalleled immediacy the circles of family, colleagues, and friends within which Albert Einstein flourished, even as Mileva and her marriage to Albert foundered."

—Robert Schulmann, editor of the Einstein Papers edition

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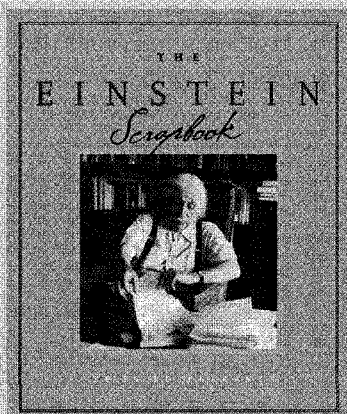
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those of religious ones, include not a few martyrs: Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. But as befits a world view that gives short shrift to an afterlife, the acquisition of secular sainthood can be savored prior to death. Václav Havel and Nelson Mandela have been canonized, judging from the citations in newspapers. So have U2's Bono and the rocker-humanitarian Bob Geldof.

The fondness for relics—a piece of the True Cross, a tooth of the Prophet, the rod of Moses—is a well-known hallmark of real religion, and there was once a lucrative trade in hallowed body parts, often of dubious provenance. The trade in secular relics may be more lucrative still. The rhinestone-encrusted sheath worn by Marilyn Monroe when she sang "Happy Birthday, Mr. President" to John F. Kennedy, in 1962, was sold at auction a few years ago for \$1,267,500. A pair of white cotton boxer shorts worn by Kennedy when he was in the Navy sold recently for \$5,000. Almost every day the newspapers bring word of some new sale of celebrity memorabilia—Elvis Presley's sixth-grade report card; Marilyn Monroe's copy of *The Little Engine That Could*; a soiled towel used to wipe the face of Isaac Hayes (but not, alas, miraculously bearing his image). Despite concerns over its authenticity, a piece of Bazooka bubble gum chewed by Luis Gonzalez, of the Arizona Diamondbacks, was bought at a charity auction last year for \$10,000.

In the god-drenched eras of the past there was a tendency to attribute a variety of everyday phenomena to divine intervention, and each deity in a vast pantheon was charged with responsibility for a specific activity—war, drunkenness, lust, and so on. "How silly and primitive that all was," the writer Louis Menand has observed. In our own period what Menand discerns as a secular "new polytheism" is based on genes—the alcoholism gene, the laziness gene, the schizophrenia gene.

Now we explain things by reference to an abbreviated SLC6A4 gene on chromosome 17q12, and feel much superior for it. But there is not, if you think about it, that much difference between saying "The gods are angry" and saying "He has the gene for anger." Both are ways of attributing a matter of personal agency to some fateful and mysterious impersonal power.

As noted, it is only a matter of time before brightness takes on some of the trappings of a religion. Already there is an element of evangelical witness: "By their visible example," the brights' Web site (www.the-brights.net) explains, adherents "can help other brights to step forward and take on the challenge of more firmly expressing their world view." There is also an apparent desire for a cadre of prominent apostles—"persons of acknowledged eminence and ethical standing," as the Web site describes them—to lend their names to the movement. And there is the telltale denominational urge to count the saved: in a *New York Times* op-ed article the bright philosopher Daniel Dennett put the number of brights in America at 27 million or more (which would place them below Catholics and Baptists in membership but well above Methodists and Lutherans).

Any religion worthy of the name needs a bitter schism, preferably over something that in retrospect seems trivial—and brightness is proving to be no exception. Some atheists have already sought to distance themselves from the brightness movement. "It's a cop-out," the president of the American Atheist Association told *The Sacramento Bee*. "It seems like a way to hide who you are to please other people. I'm not ashamed of my beliefs. Plus it's a silly name." No one should be surprised if a further schism develops, between the modest, mainline Nominalist camp (which holds that *bright* should be used only as a noun, as in "I'm a bright") and the in-your-face Descriptivist camp (which holds that *bright* should be wielded aggressively as an adjective, as in "I'm bright" and "You're not bright").

In time a bright liturgy will surely develop, perhaps starting with the adoption of an official hymn. Far be it from me to meddle in sectarian affairs, but thoughts turn naturally to one of the great spiritual epics of our time. Yes, I'm thinking of *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, about a man who is not the Messiah but gets put to death anyway. In the final scene, as Brian and his many followers hang on crosses, the crucified men start to whistle and then break into robustly good-natured song. It begins, "Always look on the bright side of life." ■

Cullen Murphy is *The Atlantic's* managing editor.



FICTION

YAO'S CHICK

Li En minced no words; in Mandarin she told the truth: "I hope to become Yao Ming's wife"

BY MAX APPLE

.....

The family watched basketball in order to enjoy the Rockets' new Chinese player. They took pride in him the way they would have taken pride in a Chinese astronaut or new high-tech millionaire. Li En, sitting between her parents, tried to pretend that she wasn't really paying attention to the TV. She mostly looked down at a needlepoint cat in its frame.

"This Mr. Moochie needs a haircut," her father said. "Look at him—he looks like he's been in a tornado."

"He's Moochie," Li En corrected, "not Mr. Moochie."

"What kind of name is that?" her father asked. "Is it American?"

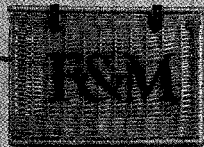
"Yes," Li En said. Then she reminded him that most Americans thought Yao was a funny name.

Her father raised his eyebrows; he specialized in keeping his body still in the midst of movement. He went to the window where he could look out at her fourteen-year-old twin brothers, Tommy and Timmy, as they practiced on the trampoline in their driveway. Her father didn't have to call out any instructions. Li En and her brothers could read his mantra in his eyes: "Elbows against ribs, kneecaps at lips, chin on chest."

Until she grew too tall and too old, Li En had also practiced as many as three hours a day. At twelve, the high

point of her life, she won the Texas girls' "Best Overall" trophy. On that day, at the Will Rogers Memorial Coliseum, in Fort Worth, while the judges observed, her father took the trophy from her dry hands and held it aloft. He closed his eyes as if in prayer. The judges lowered their heads to join him. He seemed to point the tip of the trophy toward downtown Fort Worth, but he actually aimed much further east. "We showed the fucking communists," he whispered to his daughter. When he placed the trophy back in her hands, it no longer felt like it belonged to her.

Even now, twenty-seven years after he escaped from Saigon on the day that the communists torched his gymnastics



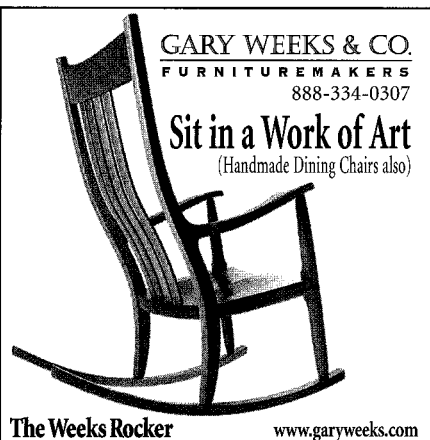
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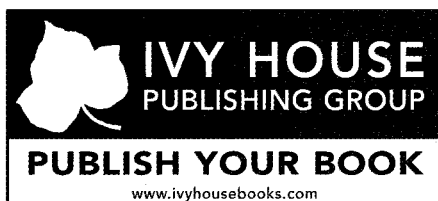
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academy, her father was still showing them, although he had changed instruments—from Li En to his twin sons, with whom he roamed the Southwest, gathering trophies.

She envied the boys, small and agile, built for gymnastics, built for America, where they had been born. At church, and even in the neighborhood, people had begun to call Li En "Auntie," because she was twelve years older and much taller than her brothers. She and her parents were Chinese immigrants from Vietnam, her brothers just plain old Texans.

Her father returned to the couch when the third quarter started. "I don't think they need so many players," he said. "Just one to throw the ball to Yao. And I think if he knew he would not get second opportunities, he would not miss so many times."

Li En had respect but no love for her father. She had not forgiven him for dropping her training when she passed five feet eight inches. "You should specialize in something else," he said, and he insisted that she go to junior college and study computers. When she shot past six feet, he became embarrassed by her size and sent her mother to Mr. Feng, the card reader who lived above the dollar store on South Main Street.

Mr. Feng said the reason for Li En's unusual height was the inauspicious hour of her creation. He told her mother, "You were in flight, your business lay in ruin, Granny sat in the boat beside you coughing up blood, pirates roamed the South China Sea, and still you and your husband, at such a moment, created a child."

In her own defense Li En's mother told the card reader that they had not been trying to create a child. "I just wanted to keep him alive. He kept saying he wished he had stayed with his academy. He was screaming, 'If I didn't burn let me drown!' He said he was going into the water. I placed my body on top of his, trying to keep him from the Gulf of Thailand."

"You are fortunate Li En is merely tall," the card reader told her mother. "This is not so bad."

"It makes it difficult for her to marry," her mother said.

"Perhaps I can be of assistance," the card reader said.

Li En refused his help. She also refused to accompany her father and brothers to Lake Charles, Louisiana, where her father wanted to once more include her in a competition. "You can catch," he said. "Timmy on one shoulder, Tommy on the other. Then we will have a killer dismount. As you somersault forward, the boys will do backflips from your shoulders. This will win first prize in family category."

Li En did not want this kind of family category. She wanted to start her own family. She was twenty-six and without prospects. At church her mother prayed, and at Crystal Nail, where she lacquered and lengthened, her mother asked customers about eligible young men. She kept Li En's graduation photo mounted in the right corner of her mirror, so that every customer would see her daughter, diploma in hand.

Her mother continued to visit Mr. Feng the card reader, who advised the family on all things, especially matters requiring cultural insight. When her father began to be called "Jack" at Happy Donut, where he worked the night shift, he thought his wife should also take a new name. He came up with Jean. Mr. Feng advised otherwise. Because she worked at Crystal Nail, he said, where every employee had an Asian name, "Jean" would sound as if she was trying to pass for a customer. Without any advice Li En refused to become Lee Anne, and her father did not insist, because, she knew, he had long ago given up all hope for her.

As they watched the game, Li En could hardly stand to see so many players pull at Yao and raise their hands in front of his face whenever he tried to shoot. She could tell how polite he was by the way he shook his head in apology whenever he allowed someone to take the ball from him.

"This is a strange game," her father said. "There is no holding any muscles in position, no somersaulting; only jumping and throwing a ball. Without a ball it would be far better." When he left the living room to call the boys in for bed and turn off the outdoor spotlight, Li En's mother squeezed her daughter's

hand. Since the Yu San episode her mother had been treating her like someone under a death sentence.

"What are you thinking?" Li En asked.

"I'm thinking of how I nursed you when you were a baby in the refugee camp in Thailand."

"Is that a happy memory for you?"

"Yes," her mother said, "very happy. My sister would sit with us. She was the age you are now, and she was already a widow with four children."

"Please," Li En said. "I've heard enough of these stories. Doesn't this family have any really happy stories? Didn't we have picnics, or go on vacations, or go fishing? Why is it always war and vengeance?"

Her mother changed her position on the couch to face her daughter. "You think because you are educated that you know everything. War and suffering are also education."

"Do you want me to suffer?" Li En asked. "Okay, I'm suffering."

"No, no," her mother said, "I want you to marry and be happy and continue your good career at Gulf Coast Data, and I will help with the children."

Li En did not answer. What was there to say?

Tears came to her mother's eyes. "Oh, Mama, stop," Li En said. "It wasn't your fault."

"It was my fault," her mother said. "I created this disappointment."

In a way she had. Almost daily she talked at Crystal Nail about her large daughter who was so fussy that she wouldn't agree to meet a young man who was not tall enough to look into her eyes. Mrs. Chuk, having her nails done at another station, overheard and said that her son was the tallest Chinese boy at Texas Tech, and so it began. Mrs. Chuk switched stations, and every few weeks, when she came in for nail work, they talked about Yu San and the possibilities of a match. Li En learned, at second hand, much about the young man. He was an honor student but didn't like to study. They loved Yu San at Texas Tech, but it was windy in Lubbock, and he missed his family. Then he had a girlfriend and disappeared

from the conversation at Crystal Nail. But when he broke up with the girl, his mother said he would be back at the end of the semester. Then Texas Tech kept offering him scholarships to stay there. Then, finally, he did come home, and saved Texas Tech \$12,000. His mother promised that he would call Li En at any minute, and three months after that warning he did call.

"Hey," he said. "I know we're supposed to meet, you know, from our moms." He suggested the Red Lobster, "the one near Target." He told her that she could call him Earl. He didn't mention his height, but he said that he drove a maroon Corolla. "I'll pick you up at seven. If you can, wait outside. I hate to circle around for parking when it's just a quick stop."

When he drove up, exactly on time, Li En could see even before they greeted each other that his head grazed the Toyota's ceiling. "Tech sucks," he said, "but U of H sucks too." He said "Bingo" when he found a parking spot directly in front of the Red Lobster. While they waited for their meal, Earl took out his Game Boy. When he did something good with his thumbs, he held out the screen to show Li En. "You want a turn?" he asked.

Li En understood that this was her marriage opportunity. While he ate steamed crab and soup and salad, she let herself imagine spending the rest of her life with Earl. He had clean fingernails and small ears that were close to his skull. She could see him, not too many years from now, playing computer games with their children. He was certainly tall enough, and he didn't slouch. When the waitress brought the check, he divided it equally. "Is that okay with you?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, and it was more than okay, it was exactly okay, it was fifty-fifty, a partnership. A week later he invited her to the Red Lobster again. And then, during a lull in a nail wrapping, his mother told her mother that Earl Yu San wanted to have \$25,000 in the bank and be a department manager before he chose a wife. And he was only twenty-three.

After work her mother consulted Mr. Feng. She then reported to her daughter

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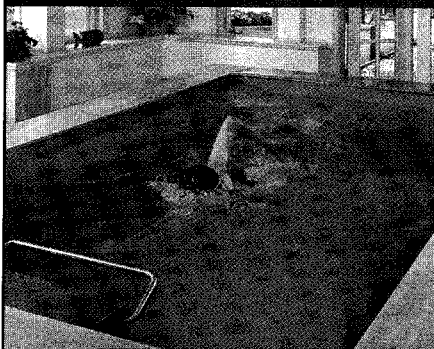
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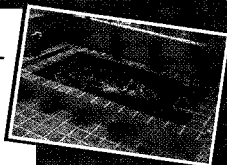


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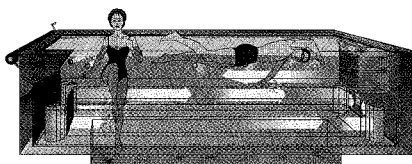
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in a bitter tone, almost a chant, "The three-year difference is the most unlucky number. Mr. Feng says that you should stay away from Yu San, or there will be catastrophes, early deaths, poverty, crippled children."

"I don't believe in your stupid fortune-teller," Li En said. "Stop telling me what he says; I don't care what he says."

When Yu San didn't call her again, Li En blamed her mother and Mr. Feng. "Not so," her mother said. "I never told his mother anything. I just do her nails now, and all we talk about is nails. That's all. And he still has two more years to become an engineer. This is not because of Mr. Feng. This is the fault of jobs and colleges."

After another month of silence Li En called Earl Yu San. She tried to sound happy and girlish and indifferent. "So," she said, "what about the Red Lobster?"

"Can't," he said. "I've got midterms and a lot of stuff going on. You know."

Li En sobbed for half an hour. Her mother stroked her hair. "I know that I caused you this heartache," she said. "I ask your forgiveness. Please, open your heart to Mr. Feng."

"Are you going to tell this to Mr. Feng too?"

"I already did. Who else can I tell, your father?"

When she had recovered enough to consider her mother's wishes, Li En walked the six blocks from the bus stop to the fortune-teller's office, above the dollar store on South Main. She read the business card thumbtacked to his door: "Leon Feng—Interpreter and Counselor." She expected an old person, but the man who greeted her at the door seemed surprisingly youthful, apart from a scattering of gray hairs. In painter's trousers and a Hawaiian shirt, he looked like a middle-aged man who had won a shopping trip to the Gap, the name on his sneakers. He led her to a plastic lawn chair in what seemed to be his living room, dining room, and office. An IBM electric typewriter and a rice cooker sat side by side on his table.

"I am here only because of my mother," Li En said.

He smiled and looked serious at the

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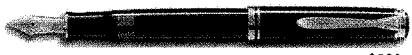
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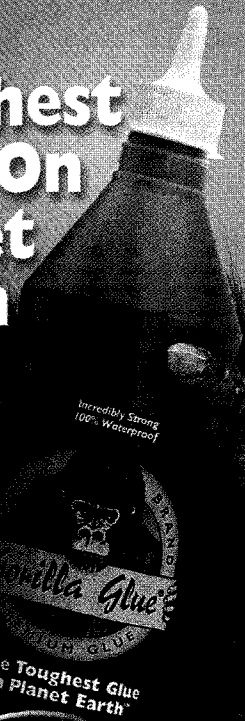
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same time. "I understand this. Do you prefer to speak English?"

"Yes," she said, "and I would also prefer for my mother and you to please respect my privacy."

"Of course," he said. "I only wish to be of service, if this is possible."

She could see the dust in the corners of the room, the crumbs on the tabletop. She wondered why her mother, who came here so often, didn't volunteer to clean up a bit.

"Is there some service I can do for you?" he asked.

"You can stop telling my mother that I was conceived in an inauspicious hour."

He lowered his eyes. "I'm very sorry," he said. "I know this must be a problem."

"Not for me," Li En said, "but you make my mother sad." He nodded. "Why do you tell her such things? Why do you seal my fate?"

"I do no such thing," Mr. Feng said. "I only advise on specific matters. Your mother asked me once, 'Should I buy a refrigerator with ice maker?' I said no. If you lack ice, perhaps this is my fault."

"You know what I lack," Li En said. She rose to her full height, so that Mr. Feng had to look up and expose his Adam's apple to her judgmental eyes. She was ready to leave, but after making the effort to see him, she also wanted him to tell her something—maybe a recipe, a secret phrase, a type of perfume, the name of a singles service. She wouldn't act on anything he said, but she still wanted to hear something; she wanted to come away with an assignment. She sat down.

"Well," Li En asked, "are you going to tell me what to do?"

"This is possible," Mr. Feng said. "The fee will be fifteen dollars."

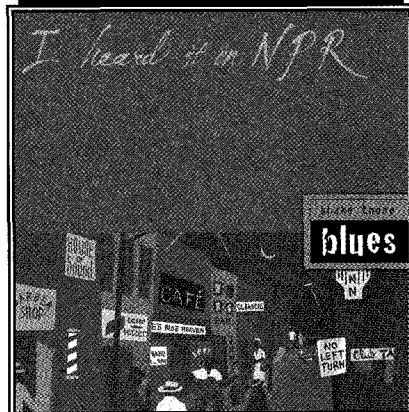
Li En laughed to cover her anger. "So, you are just like everyone else," she said. "My mother's fortune-teller hero is just like the dentist and the dry cleaner."

"Yes," he said. "Deliverer of services."

Li En reached for her purse. She would take the money out of what she paid her father for rent. She would tell him, "Female needs." If he could take nights off work to travel with the boys, he could pay for Mr. Feng. She handed the fortune-teller three fives.

"Very, very good," Mr. Feng said.

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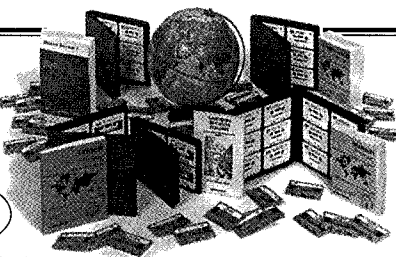
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"No," she said. "I require advice about marriage."

Mr. Feng held up his hands, looked at them himself, and then presented all ten fingers to Li En. "No ring of marriage," he said. "I have not had that good fortune myself."

"Then how can you advise others?"

"This is a problem," he said. "Most of the time I give advice on financial matters or cultural misunderstanding. Can you return next week? This will give me time to consult sources and books."

Li En rose again—this time to leave, not to intimidate him. "I don't think I need your advice," she said. On the way out she stopped at the dollar store and bought her mother a card full of colorful hairpins.

Her family didn't take a newspaper. The boys seemed not to care about news, and her parents practiced their reading just as well on free neighborhood weeklies. Li En started to buy the *Houston Chronicle* at the bus stop. First she looked for photos of Yao Ming, and then she scanned the pages for his name. She didn't know what the letters and numbers in the box score meant, but she understood that higher numbers were better for him, and she took great pride in seeing them. She wanted to go to a game but felt embarrassed to tell her mother, and once more involve her in private matters. In January Li En lied. "On Tuesday a benefit will honor my boss," she said, and her mother suggested—as Li En knew she would—that her daughter wear the red silk dress that Mrs. Wang had made especially for such occasions.

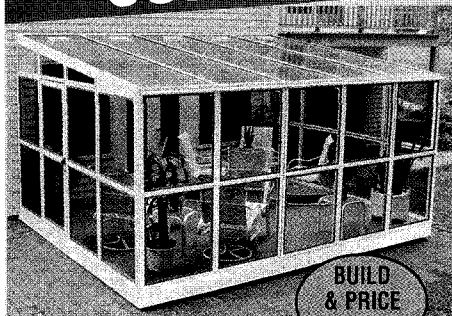
"It's going to be casual," she told her mother.

"For you, casual," her mother said. "For Mr. Lerner it's very important." Her mother offered to make a floral arrangement for Mr. Lerner's table.

"Stop it," Li En yelled, angry at herself for lying and at her mother for

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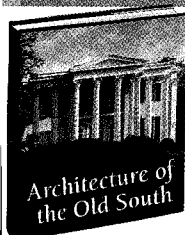
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making the lie take on so much importance. "I'll just be home late, that's all."

On Tuesday, the day of the Rockets-Timberwolves game, Li En felt sick to her stomach. By noon she had to leave work. She still hoped to be able to attend the game, but when her mother came in from Crystal Nail at three o'clock, a half hour before the twins returned from school, Li En told her everything. Then she vomited and had chills. Her mother gave her a hot-water bottle and the feather comforter that they rarely needed in Texas. She slept fitfully throughout the evening. When her mother checked on her at eleven, just after her father left for the night shift at Happy Donut, she whispered in Chinese the score of the game: "Rocket a hundred and one, Timberwolf ninety-seven."

"Plural," Li En said. "They're all more than one."

"Okay," her mother said, "but only one matters."

The following day she still felt weak and dizzy. Her mother left her some soup in the refrigerator, and Li En was relaxing on the couch and watching ESPN Classic when Mr. Feng made a house call.

"Please excuse me," she told him when she answered the door. "I don't feel very good."

"I understand," he said, "and I'm sorry to disturb you. I will stay only a minute." His eyes lingered on the TV, where the 1984 Super Bowl was being replayed. From a plastic bag he withdrew a box of chocolate-covered cherries and a small purple plant. He put them on the kitchen table. "I hope you are better very soon."

Because of his gifts she felt obliged to play hostess, at least briefly. "Would you like some tea? Forgive me for being dressed like this."

"I should be asking forgiveness for arriving without warning," he said, "and your dressing gown is very lovely. Is it also made for you by Mrs. Wang?"

"Oh, God," Li En said, "is there anything my mother hasn't told you? No—I bought this at JCPenney. Do you want to know the size and the price? Do you need the sales receipt?"

Mr. Feng turned pale. She thought

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his hand shook, and she regretted showing him so much temper. The fortune-teller was a busybody, no doubt about that, but he probably intended no harm. She should be angry at her mother, not at him. She swore to herself that she would never again confide in her mother.

"Don't trouble yourself to make tea," he said.

"It's no trouble; we have boiling water in the hot pot." She pointed to the counter.

"If you don't mind, then," Mr. Feng said, "I'll have coffee." He reached into his pocket for an aluminum-foil single-serve packet of instant and a companion packet of creamer. He smiled proudly. "Dollar store," he said.

At the kitchen table, with the steam from his coffee cup fogging his large glasses, Mr. Feng made himself comfortable.

"Do you have many clients?" Li En asked.

"Some weeks are better than others. Your mother is my most steady customer."

"If I may ask, how do you make a living at your job? I mean, how many people these days go to a card reader rather than to a psychologist?"

"Many," he said, "although it's true that Westerners prefer astrology and palm reading and tarot. But it has been my good fortune to live where I do. If I have even one client each week, I can easily buy milk and bread and beef jerky and peanut butter, and I never lack for a great variety of cheese and sweets and frozen pizza bites."

"I get it," she said.

"The dollar store is a wonderful American institution. There everything truly is equal. And evenings, after nine P.M., it is my pleasure to sweep and mop the floors and tidy the shelves. For this service I receive free rent."

"So you can live on almost nothing?"

"Almost."

"And you're happy about this?"

"Yes," he said. "Who wouldn't be?"

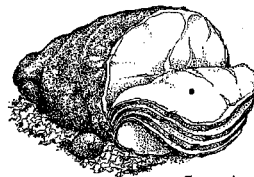
"I wouldn't," she said. Then Li En stopped herself. If he was happy that way, let him be happy.

"Are you a sports fan?" he asked.

"I'm sure my mother has told you about my interest in basketball."

Mr. Feng nodded, and when Li En

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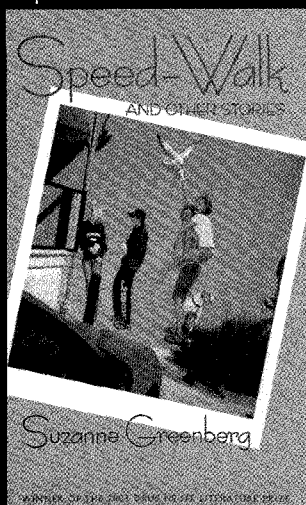
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blushed, he put his lips to his coffee cup and stayed in that position until she chose to speak again.

"As long as you're here," she said, "do you have any advice about this matter of sports?"

"I do," Mr. Feng said. It was clear that he was only waiting to be asked. He pulled a sheet of lined paper from his pocket and stood as he read aloud, the way a child would in a school play.

"I have consulted the I Ching and also the writings of a psychologist from the capital of Sweden. Both advise the same thing," Mr. Feng raised his fist in the air. "Go for it," he said loudly. Li En noticed that his eyes, though no longer fogged by steam, still seemed clouded. He waited a moment for his advice to sink in. "Okay," he said. "All good wishes for your recovery from illness."

He bowed his head slightly and backed away from her toward the door. Li En, pleased by his energetic advice in spite of her skepticism, luxuriated for a moment before she ran to the door and called out to Mr. Feng, who was already at the bottom of the iron staircase, "Do I owe you fifteen dollars for this?"

"No," he said as he turned to face her. "The original fee paid for this research."

The next home game was Thursday, Utah Jazz. Li En told her mother in an offhand and icy way that she would be home late. Nothing else. At the box-office window a woman with the face of a dog told her, "Sold out." When Li En didn't understand, the woman pointed to a sign.

"But I only want one ticket," Li En said.

"I can sell you one for tomorrow, Seattle, or next Tuesday, San Antonio. That's bobblehead night. First five thousand fans get a free bobblehead of the Cat."

"I want today," Li En said.

"Sorry," the lady said. "Next time why don't you call first and charge your ticket? Then you can go straight to the will-call window."

Li En turned away from the box office. People singly and in groups were approaching the arena from all angles, even from underground. Watching entire families and people bouncing with

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anticipation emerge from the parking tunnel made her think of the risen dead on the day of salvation.

"I've got three in section one-twelve," a black man with a goatee whispered in her ear as he held the tickets literally in front of her eyes. "Nine rows behind the iron, the seat to beat at dunk time."

"I only want one ticket," Li En said.

"One is better than none. Slip me seventy-five and in section one-twelve you will arrive."

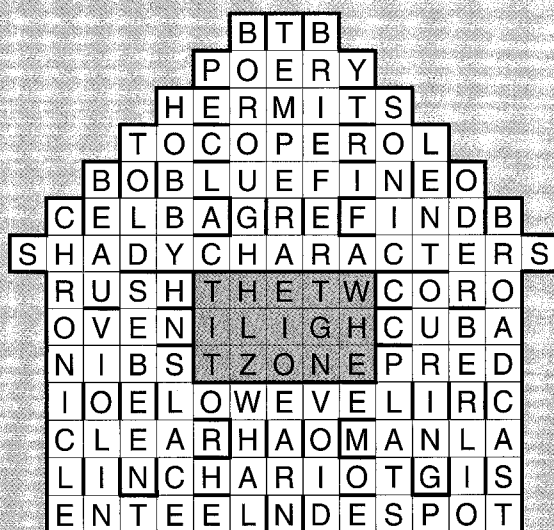
Li En handed him four twenties, and he plucked her change from a wad of bills in his front pocket. "Enjoy the game," he said as he walked away from her, holding his two remaining tickets in the air.

While she watched the game, Li En tried to be interested in all the players, but she kept her eyes on Yao Ming. She liked best when he wasn't playing. Then she could look at him sitting on the bench and imagine him at home relaxing in a chair especially elongated for him, reading the Chinese paper while she prepared his supper. After dinner she would help with his English, and if his mother wanted to live with them, that would be all the better. She knew that he earned millions of dollars, but she would continue to work, because you could never trust the government of China to actually let him keep that money.

During a time-out she was staring at the bench and hardly noticed the roar of the crowd, but when the chant began, she looked away from the resting Yao to the middle of the floor. "Turbo, Turbo," the crowd chanted, and she spotted a creature dressed head to toe in a blue-and-silver suit. He held a basketball in his right hand and raced toward the basket in front of her. At the free-throw line his feet hit a three-by-three trampoline exactly in stride, and he executed a somersault. On his way down he dropped in the ball, and the crowd went wild. People cheered far more than they did for Yao Ming. Turbo walked to the center of the floor, raised his arm in triumph, and ran away. When the players returned, Li En was still holding her breath.

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basket. She'd had no idea that these things happened at basketball games. They never showed this on television. Now she understood why people paid so much to see the games in person. She knew that her father would find much to criticize in Turbo's form. She could hear him say that real judges would never give points for his approach and landing, and maybe just a few for the actual somersault. But this audience was not interested in form, only in the astounding ways Turbo found to throw the basketball into the hole.

Yao Ming rested all of the last quarter, because the Rockets were far ahead, and by the time the game ended, half the crowd had already left. Li En waited until her aisle was entirely clear, and then she walked toward the court floor, where ushers in dark blue vests were guarding the empty playing area. One of the ushers stopped her at the edge of the floor.

"Sorry," he said. "You need a pass to get beyond here."

"I want to see Yao Ming," she said in Mandarin, as she looked down at the man's baldness. The fact that he didn't understand what she said made him seem more interested in her.

"Are you a relative?" he asked.

Li En minced no words; in Mandarin she told the truth: "I hope to become his wife." The usher made a sign for her to wait as he conferred with a nearby policeman; then he waved her toward the tunnel underneath the arena, the one she'd seen the players use. Li En had no plan; she allowed her heart to tell her mouth what to say, and though the usher did not know the words, he must have understood her meaning. "I will only tell the truth," she said to herself. "I will not be ashamed to say who I am and why I am here."

The tunnel led to a long hallway, where she took her place standing against the wall across from the players' locker room. She knew this was the right place, because many women stood there, beautiful women whose clothing made Li En realize that she should have dressed in Mrs. Wang's red dress instead of the gray slacks and ivory blouse and tennis shoes that she had worn to the office and then to the game.

"You waiting for Yao?" a black woman asked her.

"Yes," she said. As Taisha identified herself, Li En felt so unglamorous, so out of place, that she barely dared to touch the friendly woman's outstretched hand. Then the players began to emerge from the doorway, one after another, tall and handsome, some wearing gold necklaces, most in suits that shimmered with silk. They looked like princes from the drawings in the books her mother used to read to her. She would have liked to have each player introduced once more as he walked out, the way they had been so wonderfully named before the game. But they needed no introduction to their waiting friends. Taisha spoke to Moochie.

"She's Yao's chick," Taisha said.

"Hey, Yao's chick," Moochie said as he shook her hand.

Li En waited until all the players and their friends had left the hallway. Then she continued to wait. There was no noise along the corridor, not from the Rockets' dressing room or from the visitors' room, at the opposite end of the hallway. She heard no sounds in the 17,000 seats in the arena above her. Finally the Rockets' door opened, and a janitor wearing a Rockets cap backwards emerged. He pulled a large canvas cart loaded with uniforms and towels.

"Excuse me," Li En said. "I am waiting for Yao Ming. He has not come out."

"He leaves from the back, goes straight to the garage," the man said. "He gets into his limo, and the driver ..." He made a sign with his hand to signify speeding away. "It's a circus every time Yao comes out, so he does all his interviews in the afternoon, just before pre-game snack."

"Then he won't come out here like the other players?"

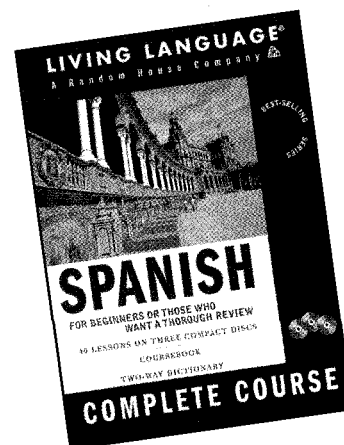
"Never does," the man said. He pushed his canvas cart down the corridor. "You better hustle. They must have locked most of the exits by now."

Li En had to push herself away from the wall where she had been standing. When she looked at her watch, she realized that she'd been waiting for an hour and a half.

She imagined Yao Ming at home, resting while his mother rubbed lini-

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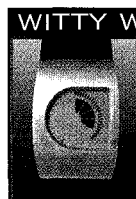
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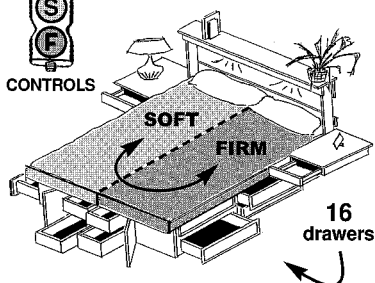
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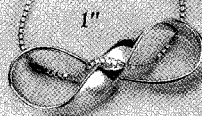
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- Crewed



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ment into the shoulder he'd fallen on during the game. While Li En had been waiting in the hallway outside the locker room, Yao had probably been examining his feet, all red and swollen from so much jumping and stopping and starting. Her own feet felt heavy as she walked up the dark tunnel to where, a few hours before, fans had leaned over the edge, almost falling from the stands in order to get a closer look at Yao and his fellow players. She was walking toward the only red exit sign still lit when she heard the sound of a ball going through a basket. In the deserted arena it sounded like a whip. She turned to see Turbo. He stood in the middle of the floor, pawed the ground like a horse, and then sped toward the basket, hit the trampoline, and did a double somersault. He had no ball; instead he hung from the orange rim for a few seconds. Li En saw that he had placed a small trampoline in front of each basket, and at midcourt was a canvas cart loaded with basketballs. He practices after the games, she thought. Maybe he has a regular job during the day, and this is his only opportunity.

Impulsively Li En walked toward the floor; her legs took over, and she began to run. She had not done a running approach in a judged event for many years, but from time to time she still practiced with her brothers, and she knew the feel of the trampoline as well as the feel of her tongue. She did a simple somersault and landing. The surprised Turbo clapped his hands. Then he ran toward her, led her by the fingertips to his cartful of basketballs.

"Can you do a somersault with the ball?" he asked.

Li En shook her head. "I have to keep my elbows against my ribs, as I've been taught."

Turbo began to laugh. "And you keep your knees close to your mouth, right?"

"Yes," Li En said.

"You're an old-fashioned girl," Turbo said. "Everything is changed now." His voice from behind the spandex mask sounded distant but friendly. "Try holding the ball, try a running dunk. It will be easy for you." He tossed her a small basketball.

Holding the ball felt odd to Li

En. She concentrated on moving her elbows away from her ribs. "My father would not approve," she said. She stretched her arms. Turbo laughed again and bounced the ball that he held in his hands.

"Dunk it," he said. Li En ran, holding the ball in front of her. She felt like a bird carrying an egg. Her feet hit the trampoline in stride. On her way down she pushed the ball through with two hands. She landed under the basket with her arms stretched, her legs wide, as if waiting for the judges' approval.

"Yao couldn't do that, and Shaq couldn't either, and Kobe ... maybe," Turbo said. "You've got the moves."

Li En rolled the ball back toward the masked gymnast. "See you," Turbo called out. "Keep practicing."

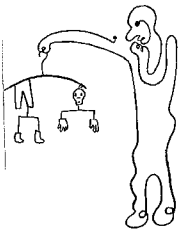
Outside, in the chilled January air, she saw no players and no fans. She had almost reached the bus stop when she noticed Mr. Feng waiting near another exit. He ran toward her. "Your mother called me, because she was worried," he said.

"There's nothing to worry about," Li En said. "The Rockets won easily."

"May I accompany you home?" Mr. Feng asked. "The number twenty-five bus runs until midnight." She noticed that he wore leather shoes and a Rockets jacket. They walked a few steps in silence. "I hope that my advice has been useful to you," he said.

Li En had some soreness in her left calf, and she felt embarrassed about how her hair must look after the somersault. She walked quickly, but the fortune-teller, though his head barely reached her shoulder, matched her stride for stride with brisk steps. At the bus shelter, beneath the lighted billboard of Yao Ming, they waited. Later, as they traveled in silence, Li En considered the hour of her birth and also the virtues of the dollar store. She decided that before reaching her stop she would ask Mr. Feng what he thought might happen next. ▀

Max Apple is the author of several novels and short-story collections, including Free Agents (1984) and The Oranging of America (1976). He has received a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship, and his articles and stories have appeared in Esquire, The New York Times Magazine, and other national publications. He teaches at the University of Pennsylvania.



THE PUZZLER

by EMILY COX and HENRY RATHVON

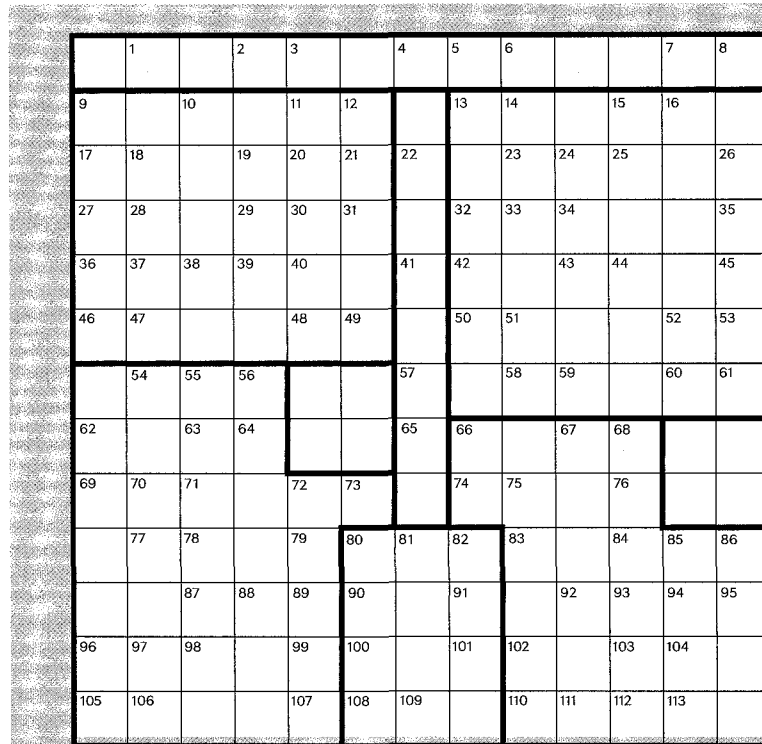
Floor Plan

Here's the floor plan for our new place. The flat is filled by Across answers starting in the upper left and reading rightward in each row; a word not finished at the end of a row simply continues from the left in the next row down. The Across words are clued in order but without lengths shown. To help you get into the diagram, Keyword answers have their letters distributed to the numbered squares. Letters in unnumbered squares (which you are encouraged to circle for emphasis) identify the rooms. Answers include one proper name.

Last month's Puzzler solution is on page 184.

ACROSS

- Home having peak about checked for flaws
- Talk with Ms. May, the lady of the manor
- Medical practitioner's house, with round walkway
- Commotion about a supporting post
- Domestic drudge recalled in novel
- Wood slab restorative of microscopic life
- Set of stairs circling an arcing window
- Safety rail repaired in unreliable stories (*two words*)
- Altering average tapestry
- Guys with gloves meet in back room
- Fireside mug containing bit of toddy for sweetie
- House pet keeps plain night spot
- Got relaxed and cut the grass around extension
- Mender of a sort renovated that spire
- Audibly exhaled and drilled dining-room piece
- Shrubbery tool for gardeners in the way
- Call about name for room of lighting supplies
- Farm kid with parent's first chest of drawers



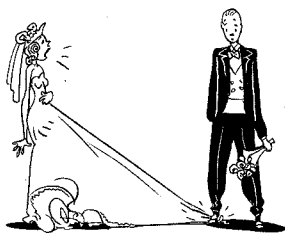
- Bent softer wood
- Exercise in silent building of relics

KEYWORDS

- Depiction of beam in doorway (32, 86, 100, 48, 77, 10, 105, 68, 20)
- Cellar appliance with jar in front (45, 113, 65, 11, 52, 25, 89)
- Powdered gypsum covering one structural column (16, 47, 31, 5, 80, 64, 91, 69)
- Tenants form a team in monthly payments (63, 28, 51, 83, 98, 72, 41, 17, 108)
- Tossed big chair, so to speak (81, 44, 1, 92, 103, 53)
- Large upper room with English trellis work (73, 19, 109, 8, 38, 94, 59)
- Require the French spire (97, 29, 70, 6, 42, 107)
- Room not on rocks (15, 40, 106, 79, 67, 23)

- Did housework with Dee and you in Mexico (90, 21, 57, 35, 12, 76)
- Believe swine about socket location (111, 93, 46, 30, 102, 13, 75)
- Female attaching sheet metal around a chimney (3, 33, 96, 82, 18, 54, 26, 43)
- VIP in a navy, or in water closet (39, 74, 58, 14, 2, 87, 66, 24, 50)
- Engineer banged a strip of gauze (85, 49, 37, 27, 7, 56, 99)
- Moor plants in niche at home (88, 4, 78, 60, 95)
- Couple shell out money, reportedly for rug (71, 36, 110, 101, 62, 9)
- Forewarning visitor, she occupies ruin (104, 34, 55, 22, 61, 112, 84)

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving visit www.theatlantic.com/issues/puzzclue.htm or send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.



WORD COURT

by BARBARA WALLRAFF

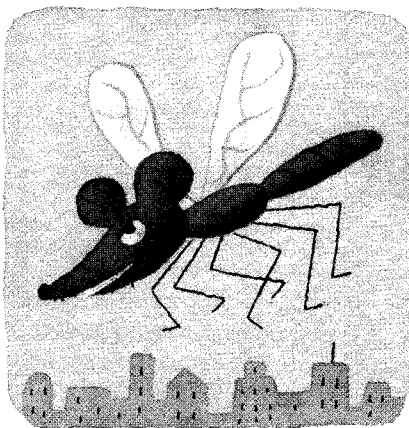
EDWARD DERMON, of Roslyn Heights, New York, writes, "Certain holidays upset me because I find myself bombarded by grammatically incorrect advertisements. Obviously, *Veteran's Day* and *President's Day* are incorrect. But which is correct, *Veterans'* or *Veterans*? *Presidents'* or *Presidents*?"

Would that it were obvious to everyone that the forms *Veteran's* and *President's* must be wrong in the names of these holidays—though they are. These are singular possessives, which refer, respectively, to one veteran and one President. But logic takes us this far and no further, because a trend is well under way toward treating words in situations like these not as possessives but as attributive nouns. For instance, the United States has a number of local *teachers* unions whose official names lack apostrophes. The American *Copy Editors* Society doesn't use an apostrophe. You'd think teachers and copy editors would know. Then again, who's to tell the Young *Men's* Christian Association and New York City's Ninety-second Street Young *Men's* and Young *Women's* Hebrew Association that their names are wrong?

We'd better ask the federal government about the holidays. The Web site for the U.S. Office of Personnel Management spells them *Veterans Day* and ... *Washington's Birthday*?? A note at the bottom of the Web page reads, "Washington's Birthday" is the designated holiday in section 6103(a) of title 5 of the United States Code, which is the law that specifies holidays for Federal employees ... it is our policy to always refer to holidays by the names designated in the law." What's *that* about? Some say President Richard Nixon thought he had renamed the holiday but inadvertently failed to make the change official. Often cited as evidence is a piece in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, in which Nixon explains he wanted to honor all Presidents,

"even myself"—but its author, Michael Storey, is a humor columnist, not an investigative reporter. Regardless, the common term is now *Presidents' Day*, and even the White House uses it. Let's just not worry about it that the names of that holiday and *Veterans Day* aren't consistent with each other.

DELIA TASSO, of Modena, Italy, writes, "On CNN this morning a military person was commenting on U.S. soldiers' finding barrels of chemicals intended for killing 'mosquitoes and ... airborne vermin.' I'm quite familiar with the for-



mer but have no idea what the latter is. Can you help me?"

The first mental image *airborne vermin* brought me was what you pictured too, I'll bet: rats with wings. But dictionaries make clear that *vermin* can include insects. For instance, one *American Heritage Dictionary* definition reads, "Various small animals or insects, such as rats or cockroaches, that are destructive, annoying, or injurious to health." So the only problem with your phrase is that maybe *mosquitoes and ... vermin* is redundant.

JEREMY ESTABROOKS, of Moscow, Russia, writes, "Nowadays instead of employing *plethora* to denote 'an excess of,' many writers seem to be using

the term with the more positive meaning 'a plenitude of.' For example, in Mike Wallace's book *A New Deal for New York* the author envisages the construction of a 'magnificent new Fulton Center hub ... into whose aerated and reorganized chambers would flow a *plethora* of north-south lines.' Would we really like to stuff downtown New York with a *plethora* of new transportation lines? Is my understanding of this misuse correct?"

Yes, indeed, at least to the extent that dictionaries define *plethora* with words like "excess" and "superfluity." However, contemporary uses that are unambiguously intended to convey that meaning, as opposed to, simply, "a lot," are—well, let's just say there's no *plethora* of them. The brand-new *Garner's Modern American Usage* (the second edition of *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage*, by Bryan A. Garner) admits that the word is often used "as if it were equivalent to *plenty* or *many*" but calls this "an unfortunate degeneration of sense." Garner suggests the rule of thumb that when *plethora* is preceded by *a*, as it is in your quotation from Mike Wallace, it's invariably the wrong word. But a review of recent citations in news databases suggests that even when it's preceded by *the* or another word, it doesn't often clearly mean anything like "too much" or "too many," as traditionalists think it should.

STEPHEN D. MARLOWE, of Phoenix, writes, "When I attended the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop, I took part in an intense debate about whether the word *buttocks* is plural. Is there such a thing as a *buttock*?"

Yes, there is, and if you're like most of us, you have two of them.

Do you have a language question or dispute? Write to Word Court in care of The Atlantic Monthly, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114, or send e-mail to msgrammar@theatlantic.com. All letters become the property of Word Court. Ms. Grammar is also on the Web, at www.theatlantic.com/courtrecord.

GREG CLARKE

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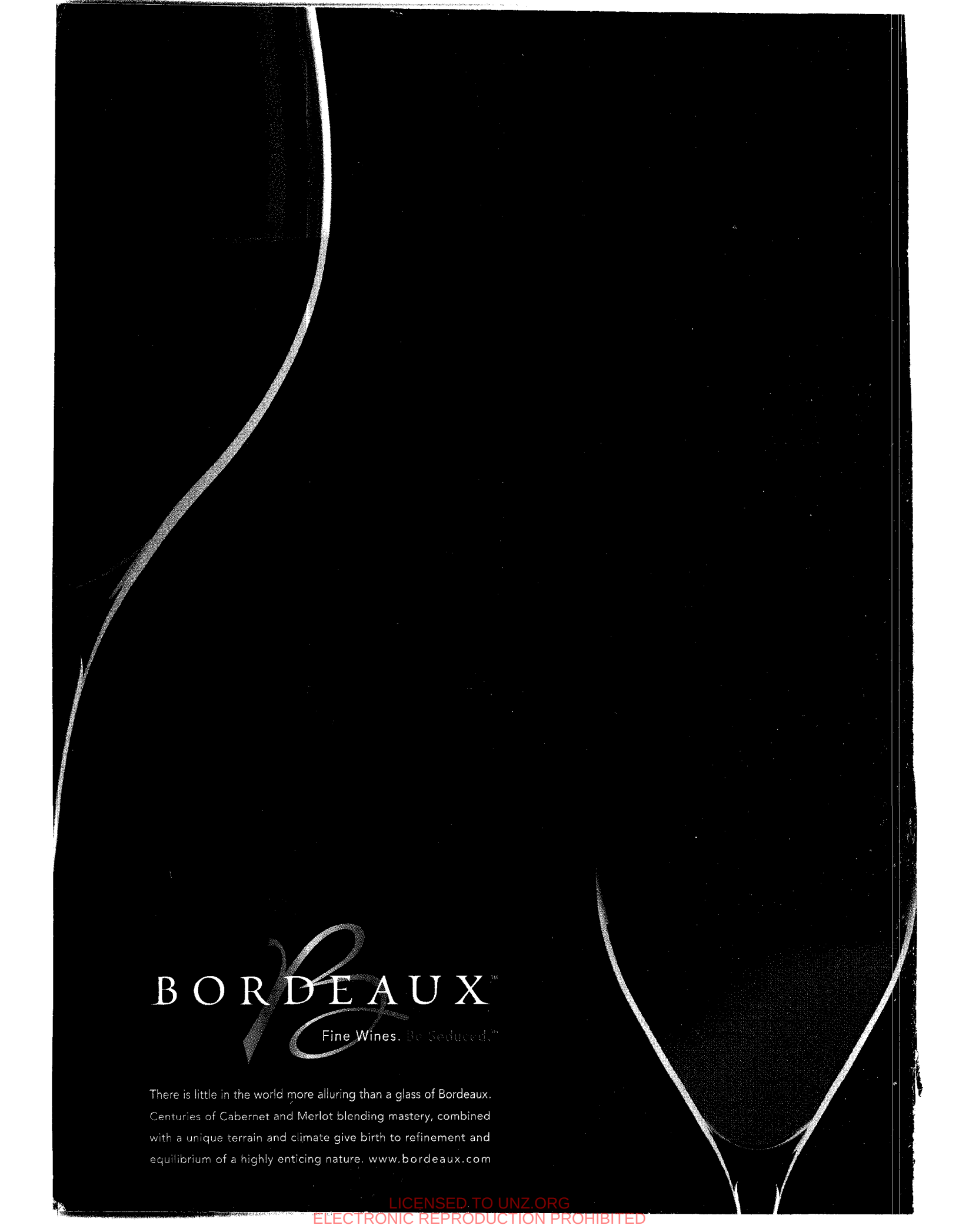


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